Interview with Arthur H. Davis Jr.

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

AMBASSADOR ARTHUR H. DAVIS, JR.

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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[Note: This transcript was not edited by Ambassador Davis]

Q: Mr. Ambassador, I wonder if you could give me a little about your background—where were you born and what sort of schooling did you get and that sort of thing.

DAVIS: Well, I was born in Brockton, Massachusetts, a shoe town south of Boston. Graduated from Boston High School in 1935. And then, quite frankly, I went through those Depression years, and then finally the war came along and I went into the service. While I was in the service, I received training as a meteorologist and came out of the service in 1945 as a warrant officer and weather forecaster. I got out in late September 1945. I got married on September 29, 1945, and on December 1st we arrived in Santiago, Chile, where I was with the Pan American Grace Airways for ten and a half years. Of course, I traveled extensively through South America and made a couple of trips to Europe. And then, in June of 1956, we came back and I worked as a meteorologist with United Airlines in Denver, Colorado. And, in 1962, when United Airlines moved their meteorology and flight operations department to Chicago, Illinois, I didn't want to leave Denver. I had started up some small firms, one of which was a public relations firm. And a group of us got together and started working in the development of shopping centers in 1962.

Q: This was quite early on in shopping centers.

DAVIS: We got in pretty much on the ground floor, for the Denver area particularly. I worked at that from about 1962 to 1968. We opened one center that was under construction, then we developed two others in the Denver area. And then, after we got those developed, I went on my own, mainly in the management and leasing of shopping centers. When I first got out there in '56, I became quite active in politics, and, in 1963, I ran for county chairman. I'd been a committeeman and a district captain and a county secretary, then I was elected county chairman of the Republican Party in Jefferson County. And I stayed on that post until about 1966. Then, in late 1967 (I still had my own business), I and a group of others went out to Oakland, California, to try to talk the governor into running for president.

Q: The governor at that point being...

DAVIS: Ronald Reagan. Well, of course, Ronald Reagan was a very reluctant candidate. We formed the first official Reagan organization with a group in Colorado called “Coloradans for Reagan.” And we had three chairmen of that; three of us got together, we all acted as co-chairmen of it. And we got quite a few signatures, quite a few people, and it was quite active. And, even though we had no candidate, when we left Colorado to go to the 1968 Convention we had three Reagan delegates. We went down there, and of course Ronald Reagan decided, on Sunday before the Tuesday, he would throw his hat in the ring, but it was too late and of course Richard Nixon was nominated. So I went back and I was still in politics, but not as active as I had been. And of course '72 was an election, which was the reelection of Richard Nixon. But then, in '76, I worked once again with the Reagan campaign, and I was a delegate to the National Convention and went out and tried to get Ronald Reagan nominated. We lost by 50 votes and Gerald Ford went in. So it wasn't until 1982 that we finally got our candidate in.

In the meantime, of course, I had been active. I had not only been back to South America several times, but I had bought a home in Mexico because I was very much interested in Chile. I'm very interested in the future of Latin America and just how we're going to solve that problem as far as the Western Hemisphere is concerned.

So, shortly after the successful election in '82, several people approached me about being the ambassador to Chile. And of course Ronald Reagan did not appoint any ambassadors for the first six or seven months, so, when he finally got around to it, I had already taken another contract on shopping center development. And it wasn't until the end of the year that I got a call and they asked me to come in, and they talked to me about Paraguay and Costa Rica. And I chose Paraguay, much to the surprise of Hemming Von Damm, who was in Presidential Appointments. Of course, I knew Paraguay from being in Chile, and I knew what a unique country it was. And then, in February of 1982, I got my call from the president while I was in Mexico. He called me, looking for me, and then I called him from Mexico, and he asked me if I'd be his ambassador to Paraguay. And that's what led up to it.

Q: Well, unlike many ambassadors, you knew the area.

DAVIS: Yes. See, particularly with Paraguay, I had traveled particularly through the Peruvian, Bolivian, Chilean, Argentine area. Paraguay I had only been in twice, but I knew Paraguay from different people who did business over there, and it was a fairly isolated, unique country.

Q: Well, sort of take this a step at a time. Did you have any problems with Senate confirmation?

DAVIS: No. As a matter of fact, Basil Landau, who was going to Venezuela at that time, and I had quite a time, because I think our first two hearings before the Senate committee were canceled. And the third one almost was canceled, because Secretary Shultz was

being sworn in at the same time and we thought our Senate hearing would be canceled once again. But I called up my senator, Phil Armstrong, and he said, “No, Senator Helms will not go to Secretary Shultz's swearing in, and so he will be there.” We had only one senator there and that comprised our whole committee. I was there with Ambassador Duemling, who went to Guyana and stayed only a few months because of that first coup they had back in '82. I went through that with no problem whatsoever, and neither did Basil Landau.

Q: What was the atmosphere before you went out and you were being briefed in ARA, the American Republic Bureau? Because, unlike some of the other areas like the African or Near Eastern areas, it had been almost a hostile takeover in the Bureau of ARA when the Reagan administration replaced the Carter administration.

DAVIS: You mean somewhat like when the Bush administration took over the Reagan?

Q: Yes, particularly in that bureau.

DAVIS: Well, no, I had no problem whatsoever. I had a guy...I should remember his name now, who was in Administration, who helped me. The young lady on the Paraguay Desk was most helpful. Shaw Smith, who headed the Southern Cone, was very helpful. We got along fine and all my briefings went very smoothly. I had great cooperation from everybody in my briefings.

Q: Had you had any impression of how the Foreign Service and the State Department operated, from your time when you with Pan American and Paraguay?

DAVIS: Oh, yes.

Q: What was your sort of mindset when you went in there?

DAVIS: Well, see, I had been in Chile for ten years. My wife worked in the embassy, and so I got to know all the embassy people. And I understood a lot of their problems and

some of the restrictions that were put on them at that time. I found that a lot of people who worked in the Embassy of Santiago at that time seemed to be restricted in dealing with the Communist Party and people from the far left in Chile.

Which I didn't find when I went down to Paraguay. Not that they had no Communists there, but we were not restricted on anyone that we wanted to deal with if we thought it would help us in analyzing the country in a political situation. I had great cooperation from the Paraguayan Desk. I had great cooperation from Tony Motley and all of his staff. Lowell Kilday was there and several others that really were a great asset to me.

Q: What was the political-economic situation in Paraguay? You got there in 1982.

DAVIS: I got there in July of 1982.

Q: And you were there until 1985.

DAVIS: Nineteen eighty-five. When I arrived, of course, the only thing the United States was doing for Paraguay was fifty thousand dollars a year on the military education and training program, because there still was its human rights record. The main thing was that Paraguay was rated high on the list, particularly in the Western Hemisphere, among those violating the human rights of their citizens. And we did have a confrontation, from 1977 on, when Robert White was there, where he had no real rapport with the president of Paraguay. And we still continued that.

In fact, my first meeting, it was quite interesting, I went down there, and when I was received by President Stroessner (I always like to tell this story because it developed into something later on), I presented my credentials, he asked me to come and sit with him, I sat down, and, after exchanging greetings from President Reagan to him personally and so forth, he turned to me and said, “I'm so glad you got rid of that Carter gang. You know, they almost wrecked our relations with all that stuff about human rights.”

I didn't realize he was going to bring it up that early, so I said to him, “Well, Mr. President, the human rights policy of the United States government has not changed with the President. That is something that all of the people—Democrats, Republicans, liberals, and the conservatives—believe that each and every citizen of this world has basic human rights.”

And he turned to his foreign minister (this was on a Friday) and said, “Benisto, I want you to meet with this man Monday morning. Meet with this man Monday morning!”

So we wasted no time in letting them know that the human rights program started by Jimmy Carter would be continued, even though we might not do it in such a confrontational manner.

Q: You were there in sort of the waning days of Stroessner, weren't you?

DAVIS: Well, he lasted until 1989. I would say that the human rights situation had greatly improved.

You have to remember that when Robert White went down there in 1977, it was estimated that sixteen hundred to seventeen hundred political prisoners—people like you and I and our wives and children and other friends—who had gone against Stroessner had been thrown in jail for three months, four months, five months, some up to four to five years, with no trial, just badly treated, tortured, thrown into filthy pits, and kept up all night so they wouldn't get enough rest. That was in 1977, when the Carter ambassador arrived.

When I arrived in 1982, just five years later, there were thirty-two political prisoners. And when I left, there were only two.

Q: Well, looking at this objectively and at some distance, was this because of a change within Paraguay, or was it because of our interest in human rights and pressure?

DAVIS: Oh, no. No, it was definitely the work of the State Department in human rights. First of all, when he had acted strongly, which I believe finally took effect '77 to '80, all aid to Paraguay was cut off. The only thing that kept on was that training program, which was of benefit to us because it was the only way we could get the young officers out of Paraguay and up to the United States to realize what democracy was. Of course, the USIA kept going, but a scholarship program, whether it's military or civilian, I think is a good one, because it gets these officers up there to find out that things are not done like that any more, and that the police force does not represent a military government but the people.

We got our message across clearly. And the next Monday, when the foreign minister called me in, he said, “Mr. Ambassador, the president was very disturbed that on your first meeting you had a conflict about human rights. What is your problem?”

And I said, “Well, human rights is not my problem, it's your problem. You know, until the human rights situation that exists in Paraguay today is corrected, the relationship between the United States and Paraguay will be very tense. The United States Congress will never give any money or give any help as long as there are violations of human rights.”

And we kept that theme up. That just came to me at the time, and after that, myself and the deputy chief of mission/political officer, that was the argument we used: “Look, human rights is not our problem, it's your problem.”

Q: Well, how do you work on this? We had basically cut off all aid and major contact, probably major visits, and everything else since '77, I would have thought that Paraguay would have learned to adjust, and Stroessner had his own agenda. Why was he...?

DAVIS: Well, see, along with that, the United States Embassy, whether it started in the '70s or whether it had been going on, but it was very well-handled in Paraguay. George White would invite all the opposition to his parties, and some of the senators and congressmen did not like that, particularly. When I got there, I invited both. The American

Embassy, I would say from '82 to '85 and continuing on after that, probably, was the only place where you could get the opposition and the government officials there together—in a very tense situation, but at least they could talk and converse.

It was amazing. It's a small country, everybody knew one another, you knew one another from school. I remember I was in Paraguay last year, and I was talking to one of the Mapocos who had been exiled for twenty-five years and then brought back, he was saying that he'd never forget the night he went to my residence. One of the men brought back had been picked up and badly treated for three or four days, and, finally, through the efforts of the embassy, we got him out. And on the day we got him out, we had a reception at the residence. And so Mr. Casabianca asked me if he could bring this gentleman along. And I said, “Be sure to. I'm glad he's out, bring him over.” And when he came in, the man who threw him in jail, Ministro Montenaro, who was minister of interior, a very vicious, very tough, cruel man, when he walked in, he greeted him and said, “Oh, (whatever his name was) Carlos, how are you, I'm so glad to see you,” as if nothing had ever happened.

And that happened not only here, but it happened in Eastern Europe. When I was in Czechoslovakia, I was talking to the foreign minister, a man who had been shoveling coal three months before and was now foreign minister when Havel went in. He was saying, “I will never forget that, ten years ago, the American Embassy invited us into their residence. That was the only way we got to talk to reporters and talk to other diplomats. Gradually other countries followed suit, but you were the people that came and gave the opposition faith.”

And that's what we did in Paraguay. The opposition finally felt they had somebody.

Q: When you went out there, obviously, in Paraguay, I'm sure human rights was at the very top of your list, wasn't it?

DAVIS: Yes.

Q: But were you under any either instructions or constraints? For example, one thinks of the right wing of the Republican Party with Senator Helms of North Carolina saying we're putting too much worry about human rights, we've got other things and all that. What was sort of the atmosphere from Washington that you were getting on this?

DAVIS: Well, I tell you. First of all, the State Department backed me up a hundred percent. I remember I went back one time and I met with Senator Dodd, and some Democrats who you might classify as liberal to moderate, and Jesse Helms, and Armstrong. And every one of them, the first thing they did when I walked in was to congratulate me on what I was doing in Paraguay. Whether it was conservative Republican, or liberal Democrat, or moderate both, they were a hundred percent behind me.

And then Tony Motley and I...

Q: Tony Motley at that time was...?

DAVIS: Was the assistant secretary of Latin American Affairs. We decided that you don't get much done if you have conflict with the man making the decisions. And when you talk about executive authority, that's what you have in Paraguay. I remember one day I was in President Stroessner's office and he was signing the permissions for people to bring their diplomatic cars in. No decisions are made without Stroessner knowing about it. So you were not going to get anything done. For instance, the people in jail that we got out would never have got out if I didn't have a rapport with President Stroessner. In fact, in spite of our conflicts, every time I called him, If I called him Monday or Tuesday, I went in to see him Thursday or Friday. And we established very early it would be one-on-one. We met alone, so we could talk frankly.

Q: Obviously, you speak Spanish.

DAVIS: S#. And he always kidded me about my accent. I used to tell him, “If you think my accent's bad in Spanish, you ought to hear in English.”

Q: Yeah, well you've got a good New England accent.

DAVIS: Yes, but it doesn't help me in Spanish. When I first went down, it was very difficult because I hadn't spoken it for about twenty-six years. But Stroessner had a great sense of humor.

Another story about Stroessner. When I first got in, of course I had traveled many hours, I think it was twenty hours or so, to arrive. And when I arrived, of course my whole contingent was waiting there to greet me, and they grabbed me to go on television. And so I went on the air with my speech, no matter how tired I was, but somehow that just came out, and it went very smoothly.

But, about three months later, he said, “You know, I was down in Villarrica, and one of the ladies down there said she heard you speak when you arrived at the airport. And she was saying you spoke with so much warmth. You mentioned how your son had been down there with the amigos, and how you had always looked forward to coming back and thanking the people for treating your son so well, and you had never expected you would come back as the ambassador of the United States. She thought that was very warm.”

And so I'm beaming all over.

And he looked me in the eye and said, “Then she said, 'What kind of Spanish is that he was speaking?'”

But we kept it up. We kept fighting. We did it with Paraguayans, too.

Q: Let's talk about this one-on-one with Stroessner, a very important figure. He was the head of government, in one form or another, for how long?

DAVIS: Since 1954.

Q: Fifty-four to '89.

DAVIS: When I arrived, he had been there over thirty years.

Q: Well, looking at this as an exercise in diplomacy, here you are, you have something that he probably doesn't want to hear, how did you maintain relations? Say, somebody would be thrown into jail, a Paraguayan, you want to get him out, how could you get somebody out of jail?

DAVIS: Well, it was kind of interesting. Usually something would come up coincidental at that time. And I remember one time they printed a document, which they claimed came from the Agency, and it had...

Q: You're talking about the Central Intelligence Agency.

DAVIS: Yes. And they printed that to prove that Raul Bastos, one of their famous authors, had gone to Cuba during the '60s. What this was, was a list of people who had traveled to Cuba during that period. I was furious that that document was exposed and they claimed it came from the US government. So I went in to see Minister Montenaro, the minister of interior, and we really went back and forth about this trying to bring the United States into their problems, that the United States was not involved in this, and that Raul Bastos had not gone to Cuba. We knew that, wherever they got this document, it was just a list of people who had made inquiries about going to Cuba, and that, whether he had gotten a visa or not, he hadn't gone. So, when we were walking out, he said, “Well, the president is very sad that you are so concerned about this, and he wants to know what you can do.”

And I said, “Well, I would like you to tell the president that I would like to see...” and I listed seven men. I said, “These men have been thrown in jail. Their wives and families are waiting. One of them has a son who is supposed to return to go back to his third year

of medical school. He can't leave because his father was thrown in jail. And I wish you would tell the president that it would make a good impression on the United States, who I represent, if those men were let out."

And, within days, the president's secretary called me and gave me the dates when these men would be let out—except for one man. I tried to push that, and I always felt that maybe I just went too far on this, because, sometimes in the first days of...this was in my first year, in '82. I said to the president, "You know, you let out the other man involved in this same land dispute. Malgarejo" (and I forget the other guy's name), "you didn't let him out. You know, Christmas is coming, wouldn't it be a nice thing to show a little amnesty over Christmas and let him out so he can spend time with his family?"

So he said, "I make those decisions. When I think he should get out, he'll get out."

He let him out right after New Year's. I think he did it to show me I could not tell him when the man should get out. So I never made a deadline and never mentioned a date again. (I made one exception to that while I was down...) But he took it. And maybe, I think, it was because we were really very frank with one another.

In November, sometime around the 10th or 11th of November, he came to my house for lunch. And he had never done that with an ambassador for many, many years. He got there about 12:00 and we finally broke up about 3:00, and we went over all these different things. He was an amazing student of the military. We developed a very close rapport, because one thing, no matter what happened, many people came to the embassy... I remember there was a Venezuelan woman, married to Hugo Sagayere, who was a real radical, but he was badly treated and thrown in jail. And when he got to Argentina, he was a very good friend of Alphonsine. Because a lot of the Paraguayans, you know, at one time they claimed there were a million Paraguayans in exile. A lot of them did work for the Paraguayan government and got to know the people over there. But he sent me a very lovely letter, sent a letter to the State Department and thanked them for his release. And

yet, at that same time, she was Venezuelan, but she got no help from her own embassy. But I went in and said, “Look, what is going on with Sagayere? You know, his wife comes in to see me.” And that happened with several others. But, whenever they called me afterwards, I would say, “Talk to the president's secretary. The president made that decision.” I would never claim credit. The United States never claimed credit for anything we did.

Q: Well, the president never would get after you and say, “What business is it of yours?”

DAVIS: Oh, yes. Yes. We got to the point that, when they closed the ABC newspaper, I made a very...

Q: ABC newspaper being what?

DAVIS: The biggest newspaper of the opposition was run by a gentleman called Aldo Zucoleo. First of all, in 1983, I was going to go to Mexico, and I heard rumors that they were going to close the ABC newspaper, so I asked for an audience with the president. And I said, “Mr. President, I've heard these rumors. I hope they're not true. But, you know, nothing will get more bad reaction from the United States Congress than the closing of the newspaper. Freedom of speech and freedom of press is something we all believe very much in the United States. And if you ever expect me to get any way to help you, either military help or any aid to help your followers [?], I can't do it if you close that newspaper.” And I asked him probably at least five times not to close the newspaper. He would not give me an answer. We went on for probably forty-five minutes to an hour, back and forth, and he kept saying, “Don't mention it again!” And I kept mentioning it. After a while, he would grin when I mentioned it instead of getting mad. But he finally said, “I tell you what. I will not close the newspaper unless I talk to you first. I know you're going on a trip, but I will find you someplace, and I will not close it until I have talked to you.”

And that's when he and I had an interesting time after that, because then we both wanted to get back on a level keel again. And so we talked about Martin McMahon, one of the American ministers who stayed with Paraguay all through the war that took Biley Arnsen.

The president said, “I tell you, Mr. Ambassador, the State Department asked all their ambassadors to find out what's going to happen after Stroessner. Yesterday afternoon, I was sitting in my garden, you know what a beautiful day it was, and I was thinking, you know, I'm seventy...” (at that time I think he was about seventy-four or seventy-five) “I'm seventy-four years old and I like this job. The ministers bother me and a lot of the people bother me, but I like talking to my people that come in and things like that. I'm going to stay on this job, and I plan on living for a hundred years. So you tell the State Department that they don't have to worry about that question for twenty-five or thirty years.”

So I wrote that back to Tony Motley and he got the biggest kick out it.

See, another thing. When I first went down there, anything the ministers heard, they would repeat to the president. So I would say things. For instance, when I first got there, Montenaro said, “Mr. Ambassador, we have only twelve political prisoners.”

And I said, “Minister, if you or the president were one of those twelve, I don't think you would say 'only.'”

And the president got a kick out of that. He said, “You know, I told Montenaro that was a wise thing to say. You say 'only twelve,' or 'only two,' or 'only one.' If you're that one, we don't say 'only.'” So he kidded me about that.

And so, when we made our strong stand against the ABC newspaper closing, that created a big tension between us. That was a very tense time. First of all, I made that whole statement. Jack Landon, who is now the ambassador to Suriname, was my political officer, and he practically had it ready anyway, because he knew the night before, they were going to do it. So we had it all ready when they did it, we put it out, and then we sent it up to

the State Department for them to use in the noon brief. We never had that cleared with anybody; we did it on our own. And we started out: “The Embassy of the United States in Paraguay deplores...” We used the word “deploro,” and I guess they don't use that much in Paraguay, because, after that, every time Stroessner got mad, he'd say, “Mr. Ambassador, yo deploro!”

But that was a tense time, and we carried it out. He had been doing very well, and so we had agreed that the military unit, the parachute jumpers and the band from the US Southern Command, would come down on May 15th and march in their parade. And he had evidently notified his military friends in Argentina and Bolivia and everything else that we were coming down. So, when he closed the newspaper, I immediately got an audience with him and we went back and forth. First, Montenaro wanted to meet with me, he didn't want me to meet with the president. But I met with the president, and I said, “Mr. President, I want to tell you, if you do not open that newspaper, the band and the parachute troopers will never come to Paraguay as long as that paper is closed.”

And that bothered him more than anything I did in the over three years I was there. He couldn't understand. “Why would you do that? This is a military thing. They're coming down. Well, I will go over your head.”

And I said, “You don't understand. You don't go over an ambassador's head. I report to the President of the United States, and nobody goes over my head.”

And he said, “If you cancel that, I will be very... It will wreck our friendship.”

I said, “Well, you have hurt our friendship by closing the ABC.”

But he never opened it. He never opened that paper. But he was mad. He told that story many times about how the ambassador canceled out the military unit.

Q: As time went on and you were able to get more people released, were there other things flowing from the United States? Were you able to get certain things? For example, that troop presentation, which would have been fine, but something happened to cancel it.

DAVIS: Well, we did... In one year, '83, I had been there about a year, he was inaugurated, and they had gone for quite a while. In fact, the ABC newspaper, Zucoleo, remarked on how human rights had improved. But he said, see, what still is I can't... He can't go too long, he feels he has to do this periodically. At one time he said to me, before I brought it up, “Mr. Ambassador, don't talk to me about lifting the state of siege.”

I said, “Well, Mr. President, you knew I was going to bring that up, because the United States cannot imagine why anyone would have a permanent state of martial law.”

He said, “But, you know, Mr. Ambassador, I've been in for over thirty years and I'm in my '70s. If I lifted that thing now and let people go around and do what they wanted to do, they would say the old man's getting soft, he doesn't have the strong hand. First thing you know, we'd have Communists all over my country.”

I laughed and said, “I don't think you're going to get many Communists in Paraguay; I think the feeling here has been brought up so long it won't happen. But it really would help your position if you did it.”

See, this is one thing I think sometimes people don't realize, that no matter what the country is, it's very important to a dictator, a president, a prime minister, or anybody to have the people think the United States gets along with them. Even Stroessner, who once told me about an article on Switzerland, “Look, I don't care. What do you think I care what Switzerland thinks? I don't care what Germany thinks. I don't care what England thinks. I don't care what the United States thinks.” But he did. There was nothing to force him to let those people out of jail when Carter's human rights started. There was nothing to force him to agree with me. He could kick me out of the office if he wanted to. But he wanted...

One of the big thrills he had...Tom Andrews was finally going to come down and visit Paraguay. Can you imagine what happened? That was the highest-ranking State Department...

Q: Tom Andrews being the...

DAVIS: Assistant secretary of Latin American Affairs. He would have been the highest-ranking member of the United States government to visit Paraguay other than military. And he canceled out on me on Saturday, when he was supposed to come in on Monday.

Q: Oh, God.

DAVIS: But let me tell you how Stroessner was. So I said, “Fine, the only way you can cover this up is by having President Reagan send a cable down to Stroessner saying that a very important event is taking place and Tom Andrews is involved, he has to be in Washington.” That cable was on the front page of every newspaper, and it was better than Andrews's trip, because it showed that he got a message from President Reagan.

Q: Outside of human rights, when you went there, what were American interests in Paraguay?

DAVIS: Well, mainly we had the banks down there. We had your private people in cattle and in commodities. And, other than that, it was mainly a few people down there on private functions.

Q: So basically there was no really major US interest in Paraguay.

DAVIS: Oh, no. No.

Q: There wasn't really a concern about a Communist uprising or takeover or that sort of thing?

DAVIS: No, no. I tell you, our big concerns, of course, while I was down there, were Mengele, and drug trafficking.

Q: Could you explain what the Mengele situation was.

DAVIS: Well, see, Mengele, right after World War II, first went to Argentina.

Q: Well, who was he?

DAVIS: Mengele was head of the camp...

Q: A German concentration camp.

DAVIS: He was the one who made all of the experiments with twins and also with trying to create a perfect race, and also made lampshades out of skin and did all these horrible things, and killed thousands of Jews. Well, when he got out (and I've checked and it really looked perfectly all right with me), he went to Argentina first. And when he first came to Paraguay, there was no list out listing him Joseph Mengele, so he received a Paraguayan passport. (He probably paid for it, which is done by a lot of people, but he did have a passport under his own name.) So, naturally, when they were searching for these Nazi war criminals, a lot of the Germans did get into Paraguay, there's no doubt about it.

You know, you've got to remember that Paraguay was 3.2 million people, twenty-five percent of those of German descent. Most of the developing of the land in Chaco is done by the Mennonites, who are very strong out there. Stroessner himself was of German descent, too. And they have German settlements down in south, so there is a huge German influence. So there were a lot of them naturally that would come in.

Well, Mengele did get properly treated, and he made a lot of friends. He had a hardware store, I think both in Encarnaci#n and...came up weekends, drove by Jeep all the way up and spent his weekends with several friends, in Asunci#n. He had left long before I

got there, but people still thought he was hiding in Asunci#n or someplace in Paraguay. And so senators and congressmen and Klaus Barbie and those people all looking for him came down, convinced he was in the country. And, I will say this, those were the people who said, “Look, you tell us where he is, we'll go out there with you. You tell us where you want us to go, we'll go there. If you think you know where he is, we'll go secretly anywhere you want us.” But Stroessner always claimed that he had left and gone to Portugal, and then later left Portugal and went back to Brazil and settled in the S#o Paulo area. And that's what it turned that out he had done. He sent cards to people from Portugal after he left. And then a few people, when he got back, got some cards from Brazil, so that's how Stroessner knew about it. But Stroessner was not particularly... I would say this, after all, his father came over from Germany, he was a first generation Paraguayan. But he always spoke Spanish, he would not speak German. He spoke Guaran#, the native language of Paraguay.

Q: Well, you mentioned the Mengele case, were you sort of having to fend off attacks from people in the United States claiming we were trying to cover up for this for some reason?

DAVIS: Oh, yes, from people I consider dear friends now. Congressman Solarz was convinced that I was buying the Stroessner line. And then one of the groups that came down was...I forget the name of the Nazi hunter...

Q: Weisenthal, was it?

DAVIS: Weisenthal contacted me, and I told him no sense coming down because we have no proof he's here. But he got a lot of pressure from the girl that ran against D'Amato one term for congressman from New York.

Q: Holster?

DAVIS: Holstmann. She came down with a group and a rabbi and everything, and they put on some pretty good demonstrations and everything. But the man who was president

of the Supreme Court at that time told them, “Look, I've put everything at your disposal. Tell me where you think he is and we'll go get him,” but they never could come up with anything. They sincerely thought he was in Paraguay, no doubt about it. Congressman Solarz was convinced he was in Paraguay. And he could have been, easily, you know, in Paraguay, you've got landing fields all over that country and out in the outlandish places, very easily he could be there.

Q: Well, you said the Mengele case was one thing, and what was the problem?

DAVIS: Well, then, of course, with the northern outlets for Bolivian cocaine, we had a serious problem with cocaine being brought down through Paraguay into Argentina or into Brazil, and we had to, you know, keep on our toes on that.

Q: Well, did you have a sort of a narcotics unit at the embassy?

DAVIS: No, we had one in Argentina and one in Brazil, who came in periodically.

Q: What sort of reaction were you getting from the Stroessner government about this problem?

DAVIS: Well, Stroessner kept telling me how he was ready to fight any way he could against drugs. He never mentioned this to me, but his boy, Freddy, was involved in drugs and still feeling the effects of a bad drug experience, way, way back, probably in the '60s or '70s. And, although he always pledged his support, we also had great indications that many of his military people were involved in it.

Also, another time, we captured about ten containers at the Brazilian entrance, on the eastern end of Paraguay, which were seized and brought into Paraguay. And, finally, they were shipped back to Germany, to the Merck & Co. They were never delivered to their ultimate destination.

Q: While you were there, did you get involved in any disputes between Paraguay and Brazil or Argentina?

DAVIS: No. Of course, Paraguay had very good relations with Brazil, though. It still does. The Itaip# Dam opened while I was there, and that was a big event, and the construction of it, and all those events.

Paraguayans love the United States and its people. They love everybody. Of course, everybody goes in there. Paraguayans love to have foreigners come in their country. But the Americans are special.

And when I left, three Marines, with their gunnysacks and walking behind him, marched in his parade. He used that many times, later, to show me how much love there was for the United States. Because, from the time they started on this two-mile front of the parade, the Paraguayans not only stood and cheered, they stood up and applauded. And the Marines said, “It wasn't so much the walking, we were so emotional, because people were just yelling things to us and cheering us on.”

And then Stroessner said, “Where else could you do that in Latin America? In some countries, they would throw tomatoes; in other countries, they'd spit on you; and in other countries, they'd throw rocks at you. But, in Paraguay, my people all cheered you.”

Q: Well, speaking of this type of thing, you were saying you were working to get the opposition to come to your house, and getting them out of jail. Were they telling you that maybe you were getting too close to Stroessner? Was this a problem? What sort of feedback were you getting from the local people?

DAVIS: No, I always told them, if you want me to help you, I have to have the man who makes the decisions. And Sagayere, particularly, said, “Well, Mr. Ambassador, I think it's

smart. You're representing us in human rights, but you're also able to help us. I don't know how you can keep Stroessner doing this, but it's working." And it did work.

Stroessner never had any real friends, you know. The only people he trusted were the people he had known all his life. Even his ministers were not close to him.

I remember one time at the Korean Embassy I was with about six or seven ministers, and when he came in late and the Korean ambassador brought him up, he came to talk to me about something he was peeved about, and the seven ministers all came practically to attention. Not one of them said a word until he talked to them. This was about a member of his own party who I had had at my house, who he didn't like, who was an outcast there. He said, "I hear about your party you had for so and so." (I've probably got his name on record).

I said, "But he's a member of your own party."

He said, "Yes, but you know he's a maverick, he's not supporting me."

I said, "Look, first you're telling me you don't want the opposition, now you're telling me you don't want a member of the Colorado Party there."

And then he would turn to a minister and say something and they would talk. But not until he had talked. And some of these ministers had been with him ever since he had been president—thirty years. So he did not develop close relationships.

So I think the fact he and I went back and forth, I think he appreciated the American ambassador doing that, even though we went back and forth.

When I left, for instance, I said, "You know, Mr. President, I want to tell you one thing. We've had a lot of controversy, and you and I have had many arguments, but I think that at least we've kept our confidences."

And he said, “Yes, I was telling my minister the other day, no matter what we've said, or some of the things I've said while I was mad at you, and the things you did, you never went out and told people. You got people out of jail, you never went and told them he told me to do this, he told me to do that. We both kept our confidences.”

And then I said, “Yes, but there's one thing I have deep regret about. I'm leaving the country and the ABC newspaper is still closed.”

He said, “I told my ministers you would not be able to leave the country, you'd come by to say goodbye to me and you can't leave without bringing up the ABC newspaper.”

Q: Well, now, were you sort of playing a solo instrument, or were the other embassies chiming in? You know, the British, the French?

DAVIS: The first British man, without instructions, was very out against human rights violations. When they seized Domingo Laino because he came out with a book, The Businessman Dictator, about Stroessner, the British Embassy was right there at the house. He and I worked very closely together.

The Spanish Embassy, whenever I went someplace that I thought we could make a stand, the Spanish ambassador would go with me.

The Venezuelan ambassador wanted to do more, but he could not get instructions. For instance, he kept one of the men who was sought by Stroessner as an exile. He gave him asylum in his embassy for months; he was in there for months. In fact, we kidded about him having a man who came for dinner.

The French ambassador, in his way, worked differently, but he was very effective. And, through his contacts with the press and things, he was a lot of help.

And Argentina wanted to do more. When Alphonsine went in, his first ambassador came over and wanted to work closely with me on human rights. But then Stroessner implied that his borders might be a little tight if they did, so Alphonsine had enough problems without getting involved in human rights. But the Argentine ambassador was very definitely anti-human-rights violations. He helped a lot.

Most of them did.

Q: How about within the embassy? Who was your DCM?

DAVIS: Well, I started off with a great one, Ford Cooper. I released him early so he could go to Finland to be the deputy chief of mission there, but he was with me for about a year and did a great job. Roger McGuire was my political officer. I kidded them both that they got this poor political appointee, and I get there three months later, I'm a human rights activist. No, they were great, and their wives were great with my wife. And then, of course, Jack Landon, who now is the ambassador to Suriname and was charg# d'affaires in Nicaragua when they kicked out the gentleman who is now ambassador to Brazil, Minton, was my political officer, took Roger McGuire's place. I had a very fine guy in USIA, a public affairs officer, Robert Mineteo. My country team was my deputy chief of mission, who later became Dan...(I can picture him), he was great. Jack Landon was great. My country team was basically the political officer, deputy chief of mission, my military defense attach#, and also the public affairs officer. They were a great help to me.

Q: Well, what about the CIA? Again, this is an unclassified interview. Did you find it a supporting element or not?

DAVIS: Well, in Paraguay, I found it very beneficial.

Q: What about the military?

DAVIS: Well, see, when I got down there, the former ambassador had restricted his military people. The head of military affairs and the defense attach# had orders not to go to Stroessner's...Thursday was the military day for Stroessner. That's when he was a general and they used to go over there and greet him, the defense attach# and the head of the MILGROUP. So when I got down there, they talked to me and I said, “Gee, I want to know everything I can, so go ahead.” And that was a great source of information for me. I had guys named Don Stevenson and Chuck Frey, both colonels, who did a great job for me. Chuck Frey found, when the president got peeved about things and they didn't want me to come in, he would send messages back, “You tell your ambassador that I am very mad about this,” and things like that. So they were a great help to me, for a small post, you know.

Q: Was USIA able to operate within the...?

DAVIS: Yes. In fact, we had over two thousand students learning English in the...we had a binational center in Paraguay, practically run by local Paraguayans.

Q: So there wasn't a real restraint on the normal USIA functions?

DAVIS: Oh, no. No, no, no. No, they operated, they put on plays, they worked very well with the artistic groups. Of course, USIA, in the embassy, most of the people in there were opposition, because that, for a while, was the only place they could get jobs. So Stroessner knew that, but they were not violent opposition.

Q: During the entire Reagan period (and you were later to get much more involved) our policy in Central America, particularly dealing with Nicaragua and El Salvador, was very controversial throughout the world. How did that play in Paraguay?

DAVIS: Well, of course, Paraguay was very much in favor. They would have liked to have sent troops up to throw out the Sandinistas. Stroessner's favorite remark was: “Paraguay will fight communism with the United States, without the United States, and, if we have to,

against the United States." So he would have loved to have sent troops up there. He was hoping they'd call on him to send troops. He sent troops up to the Dominican Republic, you know, and they always remember that.

Q: What about Cuba? Was Cuba at all a factor?

DAVIS: Oh, there were no Cubans in Paraguay. No communist countries were in Paraguay except Yugoslavia.

Q: Well, you were in Paraguay until 1985, and then you transferred, is that right?

DAVIS: Well, I thought I was going back to... Then they came out with this ruling that the political ambassadors would serve one post, one term, and then leave. When that came into effect, Tony Motley had already called me about going to Uruguay. So, when that went into effect, they let me know that that policy was now in effect. And it really didn't surprise me. It surprised me when Motley called me about going to Uruguay, because I always thought political ambassadors only went to one post. So when he called me about it, I would have been very pleased to go. But then I lost my wife on January first.

Q: Yes, that was very tragic.

DAVIS: Yes, it was.

Q: It was an airplane accident?

DAVIS: My wife and I were going on our leave on the first of January. We wanted to stay in Paraguay to be with the embassy over Christmas. We decided that on the way back we would go by Galapagos Island, and we were going to go with a group of people out to the island. And so I decided I didn't want to be away. I never liked to be away. A month was a long time for me. Usually I just went up for a few days, but, once a year, I'd go up for a month. So I decided that I wouldn't do that, and I cut one week off my vacation. We were going to spend two weeks at my home in Mexico, and my daughter and my other

grandchildren were going to be there. And so I told her, “You go ahead, I'll come up and spend one week.” So she left on January 1, 1985, and the plane crashed into Mount Illimani, in Bolivia.

Q: That's very sad.

DAVIS: It was. And that was another thing. It was very, very difficult for me to operate with Stroessner after that, because, when President Stroessner came in the very next day (he came in actually, like all dictators, with his cabinet members and a few generals), he came up the stairs and I could see he was visibly very emotional. You could see that he was near tears, and he was able to talk to me, but, when he turned to my family, he said, “Mr. Ambassador, you will have to excuse me.” And Minister Montenaro called me later to say that before he got down the stairs (see, our reception rooms were on the second floor), he said, when he got to the first landing, he was crying like a baby. Because Marian was everyplace. President Stroessner used to kid me, “Your wife is like that guy with the nose and the fingers.”

I said, “Kilroy.”

He said, “Yes. I go someplace and they say, 'Oh, the ambassador's wife was here last week.' She gets there all the time ahead of me.”

But he had a great affection for her, and always used to say, “Look, now a lot of ambassadors don't do it, but why don't you bring your wife?”

And my wife would go a lot of places that they wouldn't go. And she worked with the handicapped children. And we started a program of bringing the isolette. We lost our daughter, because we felt that the hospital she was in did not have an isolette. We transferred to another, and we don't know, but we might have had twins instead of just one. So when I got down there, we found out they had no isolettes. So we started a program where I first would match them, and then President Rodriguez, who was General

Rodriguez at that time, my wife and his wife worked on that program. And we also worked on Rodriguez's clinic, where about five percent of them were military, the rest were people around there. So when the number thousandth baby came in, we went out with a big basket (they call it a “moiseis,” a Moses) and it had all the clothes in it. We gave the award to the number one thousandth.

So Stroessner was very fond of my wife. And so that was the first thing. And then, when he came back on the day that we did have for condolences of the general public, he said to the people, “Marian Davis and the Paraguayan people had a love affair.”

The thing that really threw me was, six months later, on July first. As I said to you, usually when I'd call him Monday or Tuesday, he would see me Thursday or Friday. Well, on Wednesday, Abdul Benita, who was always in jail, called me and said, “The president would like to know if you can come in next Tuesday.”

I said, “That's fine. I'll be in next Tuesday.”

Well, I should have thought, that made it July first, six months. And nobody in the embassy thought of it. They all said, “Gee, we should have thought of that.”

So, when I walked in, I turned to the right. You go in the main thing, you go to the right, and all of his honor guard troops were lined up. They were like Swiss Guards, you know. They were all lined up, and, as I came in, they formed the canopy. And, when I went in, he wanted to express the condolences of the people.

So when I went back, Dan Clare was the guy, I said, “Dan, from now on you have to take it, because I can't. How am I going to confront with a guy like that?”

So we got quite close after that.

Then, of course, what happened, I thought that I was going to go back, get my briefing, twenty days or thirty days or whatever it was, and then go back to Colorado. But I got a

call from Elliott Abrams asking me if I would go up to the United Nations and work with Dick Walters. Walters wanted somebody to advise on Latin American affairs. Well, you know that job, they have a Latin American affairs advisor. So I said, “Fine.”

I got up there a couple of days late, just in time for the big luncheon that Shultz always gives, the secretary gives for ambassadors. And so I served up there. And, on my way through, Whitehead, who is, I think, really an amazing man, the deputy secretary under Shultz, who is just a fine man...anyway, he called me in and talked to me for a while, and he said he wanted to see me on the way through. So I went on to New York, he called me back, he wanted me to go to the luncheon, called me back. And I wondered what he wanted to talk to me about. And he said, “Tell me, are you interested in another post?”

And I said, “Well, yes.” I kidded him, I said, “You know, frankly, I think being an ambassador is the best job in the world.” I said, “I certainly would.” And I knew that the only two places open were Panama and Argentina, but I thought they both had been assigned.

He said, “Where would you like to go?”

And I said, “Well, Panama or Argentina would be beautiful places.”

He said, “Well, we'll see what we can do.”

And then he said, “By the way, I've got some friends of yours in here.” He took me in the next room and there was Elliott Abrams and all of my family and a lot of people from Paraguay and people from human rights, and they gave me my Superior Honor Award for my human rights work in Paraguay. Complete shock. I had no idea that was going to happen.

So then I went back up. And I got a call in October of '85, sometime between the tenth and fifteenth, either from John Whitehead or Elliott's office, I forget which it was, asking

me if I would consider going to Panama. And so I told them if Susy, my daughter, who had been with me in Paraguay—after I lost my wife, she joined me in Paraguay with her three children, and they had been with me in Paraguay for the rest of '85—and I said, “If she'll go.” And so I called up and she said she'd love to, so they came to Panama with me.

Q: You went to Panama in early '86, was that it?

DAVIS: That's right, yes.

Q: Was there any problem about confirmation?

DAVIS: Oh, yes, there sure was. I would say this, if I had gone by the State Department briefing that Dick Wyrole and Rich Mayer had given me, I wouldn't have been in the mess that I was in. They told me to steer away... See, you remember, Spadafora, an opposition member in Panama, had been killed by Noriega's forces. We knew that Noriega's forces had killed him, and his body was found, in a US mailbag on the Costa Rican side, with no head. To this day, they haven't found the head. And so that created quite an uproar.

And then, after that happened, Noriega, one year to the day after the elections of 1984, which, while they may have been very democratic (and they were completely democratic, wide open, because Noriega was so sure his team would win), the indications were that Eno Ferarias and the opposition democratic forces had won, but since everybody else was recognizing... So Spadafora had been killed, the economic situation was terrible. I will say this, the man who was with the democratic forces in the United States... The United States went along with it because everybody else in Latin America... You know Latin America, how many elections do you have in Latin American where there is not a controversy? They claim fraud all over the place. So the actual election went fine, but there was no doubt that the votes were changed after the election. We didn't have any proof of that, so we went ahead and recognized the new president, a man named Nicol#s Barletta, a world-famous economist who had worked up here in the World Bank and was well respected and who was also a student of George Shultz back in the University of Chicago. So they

recognized that government. And then, a year later, since he had not been politically successful... He had been quite a failure in handling the political part of it and there was a lot of dissension in the streets. But, on top of that, he called for an investigation of the Spadafora murder. So, while Noriega was in France, they called Barletta back to Panama (this was before my time, of course, so I will make it brief), removed him from office, and President Delvalle went in. Of course, from that time on, our ambassador, Ted Briggs, didn't go to the swearing-in of Delvalle, didn't have anything to do with Noriega. So I think that's one reason they figured they'd better make a change and bring a new ambassador in.

And so, getting back to my confirmation, I went over there, and I'll be very truthful, I shouldn't have talked about the Spadafora case as much as I did. But Ted Briggs made a very strong statement about, just before my hearing, three judges came out and declared that the case was closed: there was no further evidence, there would be no more investigation, the case was closed and everybody was to get off it. Well, one man had opposed it; he did not want to stonewall it.

And so, in my hearing, when they asked, I said, “Well, our ambassador reacted as the United States would want him to. He expressed his great displeasure that they closed the case. And also we can feel very good about one thing, and that was, one of the judges at least could express his opinion that he did not agree with closing the case, and evidently there was freedom of speech there. But it would have been better if they had let the case continue, to find out what really happened.” I shouldn't have got that deep into it. That was the main thing.

But then Senator Kerry from Massachusetts said, “Mr. Ambassador, there have been a lot of statements that the Panama Defense Forces (PDF) are neck-high in the drug trafficking,” and so forth.

And I said, “Look, all I know is that I have seen nothing in all my briefings to show me any indication that the Panama Defense Forces are involved in drugs. But certainly, if anybody is involved in drugs, the embassy under my control will certainly make every effort to put a stop to it, whether it's drug dealing or money laundering.” And I got to him there, he said I was interfering.

And so Noriega's Assembly (he had thirty-nine members of the sixty-five Assembly) got together and voted thirty-nine to nothing to declare me persona non grata. They asked the president to withdraw my name and cancel my agr#ment.

Secretary Shultz and Elliott stood by me. And so the foreign minister was called up, and I know Shultz told him bluntly, “This is the ambassador. If you don't want him, you can recall yours. We'll have no relations if that's what you want.”

So they finally put a statement out, a joint statement signed by both parties, and they agreed they'd wait thirty days. And so my going down there was delayed thirty days.

Meantime, though, Shultz called me in one time to say, “I just got these photographs for you.” And there were a lot of photographs and newspaper articles. I hadn't even arrived yet, and all the walls, Noriega had had them printed up: FORAS DAVIS! DAVIS GO HOME! WE DON'T WANT ART DAVIS! and all this. And so Shultz said, “You know, I've checked. I think you're the first ambassador who has been asked to leave before he got there.”

And of course they were going to have thousands at the airport to greet me and demand I leave. I arrived, and there was nobody there at all except the guy from the protocol office.

Well, we got there. And of course I went down, and it would have been quite an interesting thing. Members of my staff met me. I had told them not to have the whole crew out there because we didn't want to make a big thing of it. I made no comment except, “I'm glad to be in Panama and, after I present my credentials...” I had my daughter, my three

grandchildren, the Paraguayan maid, two dogs, and two cats. And we went directly out there to the residence.

Q: Before you went out there... The assistant secretary for Latin American Affairs by that time was Elliott Abrams. Very controversial figure, particularly in dealing on the matter of Nicaragua and the so-called Iran-contra affair. How did you perceive him, and what sort of instructions did you have?

DAVIS: My instructions were very tough, because I was briefed one way by the CIA and the military, and by the State Department in another.

Q: Okay, compare and contrast.

DAVIS: Well, of course, Elliott Abrams and Ted Briggs both thought that Noriega was a monster, that he was up to his neck in drug trafficking and drug dealing. He and his men were into all kinds of corruption in Panama: they ran the Customs, they ran the ports, they ran the aviation, they ran the immigration, everything was done by the military, and more and more they were taking over the railroads. The only thing that he was smart enough not to get involved in was the Panama Canal.

So my instructions from the State Department were that nobody in Panama, including the commander in chief, a four-star general of the Southern Command; or the administrator the Panama Canal, a three-star general; or anyone on my staff, the Agency or anybody else, were to ever meet personally with Noriega without my specific okay. And they would know I could never make a blanket and say in this case yes, in this no. Every case had to be handled by me, and nobody was to meet with him without my permission. See, we had the Panama Review Committee there, set up by President Johnson, dealing with the canal and Panama matters, composed of the American ambassador, the administrator of the canal, and the commander in chief of the Southern Command, chaired by the American

ambassador. And that's the way it went all the time I was there; it was a very important tool.

Now the military asked me not to form any opinions until I got down there. And Noriega had always worked with them. And there were a lot of rumors going around, but they had never seen any proof of drug dealing. And please don't go down there with a negative approach.

The intelligence people, both in the military and the Agency, told me they had worked with Noriega for years and that Noriega had always been truthful with them. Some of the old-timers (to the embarrassment of some of their military superiors) told me about the lovely parties they had with Noriega, that, when they went down, he threw these big parties and had all these beautiful girls there. And he never had broken his trust with any of them in intelligence. And the military said that Noriega had been much more verbal in fraternization and cooperated much better than Omar Torrijos had. That he was for cooperation between the military.

Q: How did you feel about it when you went down there? Where was your mindset? I mean, you were getting this dual thing.

DAVIS: Well, I went down there, and my first point was that Delvalle had not ever made a move against me canceling the agr#ment. That Delvalle was the only hope for democracy in Panama. That, even though he was a stooge for Noriega, I would have to work with him and work with his people. I had already formed a very good rapport with the ambassador from Panama, Kaiser Vasant, who, though, was a Delvalle man and not a Noriega man. The foreign minister was a strong Noriega man, a real gentleman. Socially and otherwise, you loved to be with him. But a very weak man; he reported to Noriega, not to the president.

So I went down there and I presented my credentials, and it was so typical of Panama. Panama speaks more Spanish than English, particularly among the businessmen and

so forth. I went there with my big speech all prepared, and walked in, and was supposed to wait in the outer office and then go in and toe the line until the president told me to proceed, and then go to the other line and give my speech like every ambassador. But I came up the stairs (there are no elevators in that palace), I came up two or three flights of stairs and got to the head of the stairs, and they said, “Oh, the president's waiting for you.” I walk in, there's no line, just “Come on over here, let's talk.” And all in English.

We went back and forth, and, finally, after about ten minutes, I said, “Mr. President, I have a speech. I have to present my credentials to you, and I have to present the recall of Ambassador Briggs. I've got it in Spanish, so we'll have to have some Spanish.”

He said, “Go ahead.” So I gave my talk and everything. And even though the vice minister of foreign affairs, a man who was not pro-United States by any means, spoke only Spanish as far as I know (I never spoke English to him any other time), the president kept going back to English. I kept trying to go back to Spanish for this guy's benefit, but the president kept going back to English. The president, by the way, was the only Jewish head of state outside of Israel. So we talked about different connections that he had in the United States and so forth, and I presented my credentials, then went back, and then I went and called on all the ministers. The ministers were all more Noriega people than they were Delvalle, you know.

I established early that the views I had expressed had been the views of the United States. They could claim other things to be interference, but we did not feel that sticking up for rights for the citizens all over the world was interference. The United States, that was their policy, and that's the policy we'd continue on. And we figured that we wanted to have freedom of the press and freedom of speech and so forth, and we went in quite deeply on that.

Of course, Panama never figured that AID was worth a damn for... They didn't really care whether AID was there or not. The people who got money out of the contracts there, they

probably did. And AID was doing a good job on private sectors, no doubt about it. But they figured they had enough money in their budget and their economy was good at that time. But it really wasn't. They thought it was, but it really wasn't.

Q: Well, what was your impression, as you were there and on the ground, and with your contacts and all, about Noriega and his activities?

DAVIS: Well, there was no doubt that Noriega was making a lot of money on a lot of things. And all I know is that, all the time I was there, Noriega and his drug person, a gentleman named Kiel, cooperated one hundred percent with our people. Anytime we had a ship that we wanted to be interdicted on the high seas and we asked permission, they gave permission. In fact, it was practically a blanket one; we did it out of courtesy. Anytime there was some prominent drug man coming up and we knew about it, Noriega would help us with it. And when we found out about things, the PDF would go over there and round them up and turn them over to us. In fact, they were almost too cooperative in some cases, because they'd bring them out to the airport and want them to be put on a plane and flown the United States. And, you know, a couple of cases we almost lost because they felt we'd kidnapped these people. And Noriega always stressed to me at every meeting, “I want to let you know that my people were never involved in drugs.” We didn't know, but everybody there in Panama—everybody in the State Department, everybody in the military—were convinced Noriega and his people were letting these drugs go through. Every now and then things would pop up. And Noriega was laundering money, we knew that. But the proof was never really made public.

Q: Well, you'd gotten these sort of dual instructions or requests from, on the one side, the CIA and the military, and on the other side, the Department of State. Did you have a feeling that you were dealing with a divided country team, including the American military and your CIA and the military?

DAVIS: No. No. No. I tell you what, it was a unique situation: the man making the decisions was Noriega; Delvalle was strictly a stooge. Delvalle, I think, sincerely stayed in to try to bring democracy. Delvalle many times would try to get me someplace where we could talk (that wasn't bugged), to ask me what I could do. He actually asked me one time, “Can you help me get rid of one of my ministers?”

I said, “Mr. President, how could I help you get rid of your minister? Why don't you go to Noriega and tell him you want somebody else in there?”

He said, “Oh, he wouldn't agree to that. What does the State Department want me to do?”

And I said, “We want you to be president. We want you to lead this country back to democracy.”

I kept using that same line with Noriega and his henchmen. I said to Noriega one time, “General, you have an opportunity. You're in your early '50s. You have an opportunity, no matter what the past has had for you. No matter what's been done in the past and what enemies you've made (because a man in a high position like you makes a lot of enemies), any enemies you've made, you have the opportunity to go down in the history books of your country as a man who brought democracy to Panama.”

He was a tough man to negotiate with. He looked at me as if to say, “What the fuck do I care about the history books of my country?”

You know, he never talked to me about his prowess with the women or about his religion. He talked to me about his military. He was very proud of how much he had helped the United States and... things he'd done for them.

Q: How did you evaluate Noriega?

DAVIS: I didn't really see Noriega, for good reasons, for the first few months I was there. But there was no doubt you're not going to get much done or make much progress in Panama unless you did start to meet with Noriega.

Now the first meeting I had with Noriega was a breakfast meeting, of myself and my MILGROUP commander and the defense attach#—two men who really knew the Panama Defense Forces, and one, Chico Stone, who was the MILGROUP commander, who really knew Noriega. He'd been there seven years; his wife was Panamanian. Al Cornell, the defense attach#, his wife was Panamanian. So we finally decided that if we were going to make any progress, I should get to Noriega. So Noriega showed up with two of his colonels. And, of course, the papers had all been saying how I'd been sent down to take out Noriega, so I thought that I'd have to develop some kind of rapport with him. And we did, we had one hell of a breakfast.

At first, I stood up and said, “General Noriega, I want to let you know one thing. I was appointed by President Reagan to be his ambassador here in Panama. That means that I represent the United States in Panama, and any government agencies. I have not been sent down as a judge. I never had any instructions that I am to remove you from office or judge you—all these different things you read about in your own newspapers which you accuse me of doing. I've not sat in judgment of you. I've not made any accusations against you to anybody. What I want to do is work out with you how we're going to get Panama back to what Omar Torrijos promised us he would do, and that is: democracy. I want to work with you to make the 1989 election a truly democratic election. No matter who wins will by accepted by everybody.”

He said, “Those are my sentiments, too. I want to see democracy in Panama. But, Mr. Ambassador, I don't want a democracy like Guatemala or El Salvador or these other military countries that have faked that they have democracies and, anytime they want to, the military can step in and take it over. You want to work out something like Venezuela or

Colombia, where they have a division between the political forces and their military, or the military does what they want and they handle their things?”

And I said, “What I want is a democracy where the people rule and the people make the decisions. That's what is best for everybody.”

And he said, “Well, we will work towards that.”

We went back and forth. He asked me about why I'd made the statements I did. I told him what I had made. I said, “Look, when it came out in the headlines that I had made remarks about the drug trafficking by the Defense Forces, all I did was in answer to questions, saying that I had heard rumors about that, too, but I had seen no proof. And if you look at my thing, you'll find out I said I had seen no proof, but when I get down there, no matter who's involved in drugs, I certainly will do my best to stop them from doing it. I think you people will agree with that.”

And he said, “Yes, we don't like any drugs here. We cooperate with you people on drugs.”

They kept getting letters from Lawn, the head of the Drug Enforcement Agency, extolling their virtues for their cooperation on drugs.

So, afterwards, I said to him I wanted to see him alone. I said, “General, it's going to be very difficult after what you did to the freely elected government, throwing out Barletta, who you know was a very strong friend of the United States and had a lot of friends there, and the way you did it. Also, no matter what you say about the Spadafora thing, until some judgment is made or somebody can make an investigation and try to bring those concerned... You cannot deny the fact that the last people that saw him were members of your own Panama Defense Forces. I would think you'd want to have that cleared up. Do you mean to say you condone members of your... If it did happen, that you're protecting them?”

He said, “No, that's never been proven, and those are just false accusations. He was killed by Costa Ricans.”

I said, “Well, nobody believes that, including me. Why don't you want to have an investigation? The Catholic Church has been very definite about this. But that's your decision. It would help a lot in our relations if you investigated, found out who did it, punished them, and got the thing cleared up. The other thing is, I want to let you know we're ready to help financially on bringing people in. You say you want to change the election laws? We'll bring both parties in, they'll help you change the election laws. Because, naturally, new laws, if there are some things wrong in that, maybe one could see that. Also, if you want to set up modern equipment, there are agencies in the United States ready to help you set up a better way to vote and everything else. That's what I would like to talk to you about.”

So then he got up, and he was funny as hell. See, I'd just heard, two days before, that he was mad at La Prensa and he was going to close it (just like I did with Stroessner).

Q: La Prensa was the major newspaper?

DAVIS: Yes, Bobby Eisenmann's newspaper, the major newspaper of the opposition, really of everybody. I mean, they're strictly independent. They're blasting the present government, I know.

So Noriega said, “Tell me, you were down there with that dictator Stroessner. How did you get along with him?”

I said, “Well, we got along fine. We had a lot of differences. The thing is that I tried to let him know ways he could get along with the United States. I told him that the worst mistake any head of state or any dictator can do is to close the newspaper. And he closed the newspaper. So he won't get a nickel from Congress.”

And Noriega smiled, he looked at me and grinned. He didn't say a word, but he knew what I was getting at.

He's a very astute individual. In fact, I tell the people in the State Department, with all these people coming back saying, “Well, he's not very intelligent. He's learned a lot, but he's not that intelligent,” I say, “Listen, you better go around telling people he's a very intelligent guy. Because the way he manipulated us around, maybe he better be intelligent, otherwise it makes us look pretty stupid.”

I tell you what it is. He knows the United States. He knows how far he can go. He knows what gets us mad. And he had great backing. Noriega was a very close friend...I think that Bill Casey looked upon him as his prot#g#.

Q: Bill Casey is now deceased but was the head of the CIA during most of the Reagan administration.

DAVIS: The head of the CIA, yes. When Noriega went up to the United States, he usually visited Bill Casey, and he was received by Bill Casey. In fact, before I got there, whenever Noriega went up to the States, Don Winters, the station chief, the CIA man, went with him, because the intent of the trip was to see Casey. I will say this, when I got down there and I told Don Winters and Jack Galvin, the four-star general, they both cooperated one hundred percent. In fact, when Don Winters's replacement came in, Noriega wanted to give a welcoming lunch. And I told him no, I don't want him to start off on that basis. Let somebody from the intelligence division do it, but I don't think it should be that person on that level. And he went right along with it; Winters cooperated one hundred percent. And George, his replacement, also went along with what I had to say.

Q: Well, did you feel that you were dealing with a divided policy, at least as far as instructions?

DAVIS: No, no. I tell you what. The thing is, they were divided, and there were a lot of arguments going on between the military and the Agency and the State Department. But once the policy was set, they went a hundred percent. Except that Werner always wanted to make an accommodation with Noriega. He would never accept the fact that we were never going to make a deal with Noriega.

But I think I utilized my Agency man, George Hazelwood, on the country team, more than most ambassadors. I utilized my defense attach#, Al Cornell. One of the strong women I had was Sigrid Natragene, who was head of the USIA, my public affairs officer, an amazing girl, analytical, had definite ideas, would fight for them. Eleanor Savage, my political officer, a wonderful girl, she knew a lot of people and knew a lot that was going on. And, of course, my deputy chief of mission. Bill Price was my first one, and then I was very fortunate to get John Maisto, who I think is probably one of the outstanding men in the State Department, an amazing man.

Q: How about with the Southern Command? You were saying there was a four-star general. The military doesn't really look very kindly on the diplomatic side.

DAVIS: No, but I tell you, Jack Galvin... You know, in your lifetime you can probably count on one hand the real men. That's why I get a kick out of the State Department's category: “Superior and Outstanding,” or “Outstanding and Extraordinary.” And that's a hell of a category. Of course, you have to put them in that, because if you give them “Expert,” they don't get promoted, you know. The one I made out on Floyd Cooper, I said, “Floyd, I gave you a great thing. I had to lie like hell, but I gave you a great rating.” No, but of all the men I've met, Galvin would be in my top five.

Q: And he was commander in chief of the Southern Command.

DAVIS: Four-star general. He was a diplomat, a hell of a politician, and a real fine military man. But, see, he always subordinated himself to me. He always let me know about

everything he wanted to do. If a slip-up was made (and it happened once or twice), he came back later and said, “I should have checked this. It was a military thing, but there was policy connected with it.” Every time he went to see Noriega, something would come up that Noriega would want to talk about military, I let him go, but not to talk policy. And if they did, he'd say, “You know, I promised I wouldn't talk policy, but you know how it is. And this is what we did mention...” and he would brief me on the whole thing. And in the Panama Review Committee, he was a hundred percent supportive.

Q: I take it, at that point, you weren't sitting down and saying, well, if something happens, what's your plan for taking over Panama? Which of course did happen a little later.

DAVIS: No, but one thing we were taking up... Well, see, here's what happened, Jack Galvin left on the day that D#az Herrera made his statement which brought all this political dissension in. Jack Galvin's change of command to Fred Werner took place on June 6, 1987, the same afternoon D#az Herrera made his statement about the corruption in the PDF, how the Cuban visas had been sold, how the election had been stolen in '84, and accusing Noriega and his cohorts of doing this. And then he went into hiding, in solitary, in his house, and they surrounded it. And that started all the political dissension.

I had just sent a letter to Jack Galvin that said, “You know, I will have to admit that things went to hell once you left.” And I always said to Fred Werner, “Geez, you know, Galvin had this thing under control. You come in and, my God, it just goes all to hell.”

Q: Well, now, what about the Canal Zone authorities? I was thinking of the Americans; these have always been sort of an odd group. In a way, public servants, but, boy, they want everything their way.

DAVIS: The thing is, if the United States ever had a group of colonists anyplace, we had them in the Panama Canal Zone, because they had their own churches, they had their own schools, they had their own PX to go to. When we first got down there, my daughter

was mentioning that... two Panama Canal employees, a husband and wife, had said, “Well, we very seldom go to Panama.”

She said, “Well, what do you mean? You live in Panama.”

She said, “Oh, well we mean, into the city.”

And she said, “Well, have you been to the Teatro Nacional?”

“No.”

“Haven't you gone to the Marriott?”

“Oh, we went to the Marriott for a drink.”

“Well, what about the great big conventions?

“Oh, no. No.”

“Have you been up to El V...?”

“No, no.”

They just lived in a...

That's one side, but then you have to really admire what they've done with that canal. I mean, that canal is running today better than it ever ran before. It's in good condition. The thing has been there since 1914, an amazing piece of economic success. And these men are dedicated to it. And they have had privileges. You know, for years they were hired, paid people, workers in the government, and today I guess they still would be way up there. But those days are coming to an end. I'm surprised that more haven't left. I thought there would be a big exodus once they got a Panamanian in as administrator of the canal.

Q: What was the situation with the Panama Canal when you were there?

DAVIS: You mean during the dissension and so forth?

Q: When you arrived in '86, the canal had already basically been turned over, but were you feeling any aftermaths of the Panamization of the canal?

DAVIS: Well, I tell you, the thing is, I think generally the thinking Panamanians did not want the canal back before the year 2000. Politically they might have claimed that. I think most Panamanians thought that they needed that length of time to get ready to take it over. Most Panamanians—I'm talking about the serious ones, not those politically motivated or with an ax to grind—feel that they're going to face great problems with the canal. And even those who are very pro-Panama on the treaty, like Romulo Escobar, and other people who did not...a lot of Panamanians did not want they treaty and thought they were better off having the United States take care of it, they all agreed that big changes have to take place, because you can't have a Panamanian accountant working on the canal getting two or three times as much money as an accountant in a bank downtown. Romulo Escobar negotiated the treaty with Omar Torrijos and also was a strong Noriega right-hand man. He, one time in my home, was talking with the deputy director of the canal, Fernando Manfredo, and said, “Manfredo, you've got to remember one thing, we are not going to have any special citizens working on the canal. If those people don't want to accept the Panama standard of living, they'll have to quit. We're not going to have special citizens because they work on the canal.”

And I think that's what they've got to face up to, because the have had special privileges. And a lot of the Americans have had special privileges. But also, you know, it wasn't the best place to live. Maybe the administrator of the canal has a lovely home, and some others, but basically those homes are not luxurious by any standards, and, okay, so they can buy stuff at the PX that we get in the States, that doesn't make up for the rainy season or things.

Q: It's like being allowed to have a little better price at K Mart.

DAVIS: It sure is. I've read some articles by, oh, different people in public life that complain about how they're pampered and everything. But if they want to go down there, go down there and work. Do they want to spend their...? I'll admit, they were like... I think, good thing both ways. The head of the industrial plant of the canal was a guy named Coroned. His father was the head of it before him, and his grandfather before him. And that's the pride they take in their work and the pride they get in being there. They would rather hire all Americans, there's no doubt about it. They don't particularly like Panamanian executives to come in; they feel it's going to go downhill. But basically it's tough on them to accept the fact; they never thought they were going to lose the canal.

Q: But this was not an issue where you had to constantly remind the Americans working for the Panama Canal that things had changed?

DAVIS: No, no. No, they thought they had a right in the... I went in trying to understand them. They had some very legitimate gripes, you know, all the things that came out in the treaty. You know, I have never figured out why, on a military base in Panama, other Americans are allowed to go and trade in the PX. I don't think the PX was ever made for the embassy, or for the Panama Canal employees. See, they lost those privileges, but they gained fifteen percent more money. Now they'd like to get them back, but they don't want to give up their fifteen percent.

Q: Well, in 1987, when D#az Herrera made this statement, what was the background?

DAVIS: See, there was a deal made. When Omar Parides was supposed to run for president in 1984, he never was backed as a candidate, and Noriega was supposed to go in as commander in chief and stay until July of '87, and D#az Herrera was supposed to take over in '87. It was strictly devious, but whether or not they realized it, the guy was not capable of anything. He was a crackpot, I tell you, you couldn't really talk to him logically.

But, anyway, they kicked him out in June. So he immediately, after a couple of weeks, went in and disposed of everything.

Q: So how did this impact on your work?

DAVIS: Well, in fact, one thing that happened, the National Democratic Council had sent people out to the Philippines to observe the election, and they took two or three from each country. And they sent down three names to us. One of them was Aurelio Barria, who was president of the Panamanian Chamber of Commerce. And another one we picked was a Noriega appointee but also a very fine man, Chen, on the election board. And another one we took was one of the priests from the church. Well, naturally, a lot of meetings took place between John Maisto and Aurelio Barria before they went. They went over there and observed the election and came back and started to form this similar group to the group they had in Panama, the citizens group to observe the election (I should remember the name; I don't). But, anyway, that was the group that, when the charge came out, became the Civic Crusade under Aurelio Barria.

So, did it impact my embassy! Because, first of all, when they made this statement, it was the same statement I had made in my October speech. What they wanted was return to democracy, they wanted the troops to return to the barracks, and they wanted full respect for human rights. And those were the three points I had been pushing.

Plus the fact Maisto had been meeting with Aurelio Barria, sent him to the Philippines, he comes back and who is the bigger leader of the opposition but Barria, Eddia Viarino, and Meo. And the organization was set up to become the voice of justice in election observers in 1989. That group started off with thirty-six member clubs, grew up to over two hundred.

Q: So we planted a very strong seed by showing... Was this done really with malice aforethought?

DAVIS: No, we did it hoping that we would have a citizens group to be observers to assure that the '89 elections would be democratic. And that's when he started to form this group on his own. But then, of course, when it came out and he took the same group to do it, Maisto was the brunt of all their accusations as being the brains behind the opposition.

Now what happened to him, they declared a state of siege, once they took to the streets, I'd say the 7th or 8th of June of '87. And on the 13th of June, Gabriel Lewis, who had been the ambassador to the United States in the Carter days of the treaty, I tell you what, finally Noriega kicked him out of the country. And Dodd was down three days later and told the president...

Q: This was Senator Dodd.

DAVIS: He and I met several times with Noriega, and he was a very big help to me because he speaks great Spanish. The three of us would meet sometimes until 2:30 in the morning, arguing about democracy.

But Senator Dodd told the president, “You know, that was a stupid thing to do. Gabriel Lewis knows more senators in the United States Senate than I do.”

So he was kicked out on the thirteenth. On the twenty-sixth of June, the Senate came out with a resolution, and about two or three paragraphs were written by Gabriel Lewis..., condemning Noriega and Delvalle for what they had done, that they should bring these people to justice, and those who have been charged should resign or step aside until the charges can be verified.

Of course, all this time these demonstrations were going on, we had our observers out, and I was called to several meetings down at the palace, with the archbishop of the Catholic Church, to try to get them to let them demonstrate, don't retaliate too much and everything. They said no, they had told them not to do it, and they were going to do it, so

they would make retaliation against them. And we were very much involved all through that period.

But, even then, Delvalle would ask me to meet with his people. I would meet with them, and then I would meet with the opposition, to try to get the thing onto a level keel so there could be some kind of a negotiation. We wouldn't mediate the negotiation, but we tried to meet with them. I met with the opposition; I met with the church, I met with the political party; I met with anybody that the Noriega-Delvalle people wanted me to meet with.

On the twenty-sixth, they made that resolution. On the twenty-ninth, they lifted the state of siege. And on the thirtieth, they held a meeting outside the Foreign Ministry. There must have been about ten thousand people there, and about five thousand marched on the embassy. I'd say only a few hundred really stayed around, but they stoned the embassy and made speeches.

Q: Who were these people?

DAVIS: These were Noriega goons; they were paramilitary people that Noriega had hired. We know who they were. And they just stoned us for an hour, then they went down and stoned the consulate, and then they went over and stoned the information service. Broke all the windows in the information service, destroyed the waiting room and all the windows in the consulate. We had grillwork over all our windows, but they destroyed about fifteen or sixteen automobiles. We sent them a bill for a hundred and six thousand some odd dollars, and they paid it.

Q: What did this do to relations, then?

DAVIS: Well, the first thing I did was tell them that I called off all aid—every bit of military aid, every bit of intelligence aid, any kind of aid—not one cent until they paid the bill. Secretary Shultz was traveling in the Far East and got word to me. He called up and couldn't get me, so he got me through Elliott Abrams, saying, “You tell President Delvalle

the only other place this has ever happened is in Tehran. If that's the kind of relationship they want, that's what they're going to get." See, I had already told the secretary I had cut off all aid. Well, later on, he continued it. I told them that when they paid the bill we would start up, but from that time on, we never gave them one cent of aid, until after the invasion.

Q: Did you cut off the aid on your own?

DAVIS: On my own. I didn't consult anybody. I cut it off on my own and told the State Department what I was doing, and they agreed.

Q: Well, I take it then, as far as you were concerned, you and Secretary Shultz and Assistant Secretary Abrams were more or less...you knew...

DAVIS: I knew that's what he wanted me to do. The military had a lot of trucks and airplanes and things like that, that we were repairing, and I said, "You tell them they have to come and get them. We can't do another thing on that." They had a lot of batteries they were recharging, and they had to come over and take all the batteries; we wouldn't do a thing for them.

Then, of course, it kind of calmed down in August. That was the last big thing. This group who... started off with two or three hundred meeting, with thirty-six clubs and organizations and institutions and so forth, got up to over two hundred institutions and labor groups and other groups. They had a demonstration with sixty to a hundred thousand people. And they cut down all the buses that day, telling those people to walk six or seven miles to get there. And it was a complete cross section; it wasn't black or white or Spanish, it was just everybody—poor people, bankers, everybody. And they allowed them to do it, but that's the last time they allowed them to get out in force like that.

Q: How were relations with Noriega from then on?

DAVIS: Well, as I said, I still met with Noriega. I went and argued about harassment and some of the things he did with the people; I asked him to have more concern. I met at the president's palace with Archbishop McGrath and a representative of the legislature and Noriega's people, urged them to let them go out on demonstration; they're not going to cause you problems, they're going to march peacefully. He didn't do it. They beat hell out of them. But we were still meeting, and we continued to do that. August was the last big thing, and after October, they quieted down.

But then, of course, they were working on Noriega's indictment. And so, in February, when the indictment came out...

Q: This was back in the United States.

DAVIS: Yes, in Tampa and Miami. Now President Delvalle had made a statement to the Los Angeles Times, in the fall of '87, that if Noriega or anybody on his staff ever got indicted for drugs anyplace in the world, he would remove them from office. So we immediately reminded him of that, and he made the decision to do it, but it took him a long time to do it. Finally, on the twenty-fifth, he removed Noriega from office. And, of course, Noriega turned around and held an Assembly meeting, and they threw out Delvalle, and they threw out Escavelle for good luck (he hadn't been involved) and put in their own man, Solis Palma. And so from that time on, I had no contacts with Noriega whatsoever.

The American Embassy in Panama went from February of '88 until after the invasion on December 20 with absolutely no official contact, or any other contact, with the government of Noriega. Our licenses ran out, our visas ran out. In March of '89 we had to rent cars and put all our private vehicles in storage because we couldn't request diplomatic license plates. I think that's a record. I don't think any other embassy has ever gone that long without having any dealings with the government. Also they recalled me.

It went on, and the blessing came at the end of '89 when the opposition got united, because we really didn't think all those different diverse groups would get united. But through the leadership of Arias Calderone and Billy Ford and Endara, they agreed Endara should head the ticket, and that helped, and they came in with a united slate and stayed united all through the election.

Q: Today is July 3, 1991, and this is the second interview with Ambassador Arthur H. Davis. Last time, Mr. Ambassador, we were talking about the events that lead up to sort of basically shutting off relations with the Panamanian government, although you were still in Panama. Noriega had been indicted and so on, and then everything just sort of ceased, although you were there. With this indictment of Noriega, were you sort of following this on a daily basis, and were you getting sort of legal advice from the Department of State, and what were your relations with the Department of State while this was developing?

DAVIS: Of course, this was developing through the entire year of 1987, and I think it was in September or October where they felt quite confident they would be bringing in an indictment. Then evidently they felt that they needed more solid evidence, because it looked for a while in the first part of '89 as if they didn't know whether the grand jury was going to indict. I knew that it was up, but both the State Department and the embassy received only a few days' notice that it was going to come down, I think it was on February 5th. So we did get that warning.

I remember that it was quite interesting, so typical of communications today. President Delvalle, of course, was in hiding. And I got a call from the State Department, telling me that I could brief President Delvalle that the indictments were coming out the next day from both Tampa and Miami, and that it would be in the news on the next day. I was told not to say who the indictments were against in addition to Noriega. I was not to say on what these charges were to be based, nor about the Medell#n and the Dari#n cocaine plants or the money laundering. I was not to brief Delvalle on that. But on the way over to Delvalle's, CNN news came on, and I knew Delvalle spent all his time watching TV, all

the different news programs, so CNN news announced that he was going to be indicted in both Tampa and Miami, he was indicted about the activities of the cocaine plant in Dari#n and his money laundering in marijuana on something else. And so I briefed Delvalle on everything that I knew, knowing he had heard it, and he had heard it.

Q: Just one question here. Delvalle's in hiding, yet here's the American ambassador going to his place of hiding. I would have thought that this would have been...

DAVIS: Let me tell you how tricky... You've got to remember one thing, that Panama has no laws against tinted windows. Also, the young man that picked me up, a man named Toby, did not want anyone to follow him, but I told my guards to try to keep pace with him. They lost him. He took such a circuitous route and drove so deftly that they lost him. Then from there we would drive into the lower deck parking, which was enclosed, you needed a signal to open it up, drive in, park, then he would get out and walk in and check if the service entrance was all right, then he'd signal me and I'd get in the elevator and go up. President Delvalle had one theory, which evidently is a good one: Never hide anyplace where there's any help at all. I only knew of one location that he was in. He occupied apartments and houses that did not have maids there; the people were in Europe or other countries, and he just went in and occupied their homes. It was interesting, the place that I went to brief him in, and which he was there twice, was in the same apartment house that Manuel Noriega's mistress was located, and her apartment was three floors down. And the minister of government and justice, Minister Chiari, was also there in the same building. And two of our officers from the embassy were in that same building.

Q: I would think you would have been meeting the wrong people on the elevators.

DAVIS: Well, no, we took the service elevator. The service elevator was to the rear, and we'd come up to the rear, and then he'd have his rear door open, and I'd always go in through the kitchen. Always used the service elevator.

So, anyway, I went over there to brief him. And I might mention that at that same time I reminded him of the fact that in the fall of '87 he had said that if anybody on his staff, including General Noriega, had been indicted for drugs, he would ask them to resign their posts or step aside while the investigation was going on.

Q: So you were briefing him, but what were you doing? Had the shutdown come by this point?

DAVIS: Well, see, we had recognized Delvalle as the president of Panama. We did not recognize the Noriega government. I don't know whether I mentioned it before, but I imagine that's a unique circumstance, not only for the United States but for any embassy, that we maintained an embassy from February of 1988 until December 20, 1989, when we invaded, with absolutely no official contact with the de facto government of Panama.

Q: That's almost two years.

DAVIS: Twenty-two months.

Q: How does one operate under these circumstances? Was the fact that you had access to the Canal Zone amenities, or something like that, about the main that kept you going?

DAVIS: Well, you have to remember that we not only had the Canal Zone, but we had the huge airbase. Our people would go out and play tennis, go out there and see the movie, go out there for the shows. We also bought all our food from the PX. We did have one very big problem, and it was one that really bothered me the most, particularly when it came to the ladies in the embassy. And, by the way, they were as tough as anybody; I don't mean to imply that they were whiners, because they weren't. But it did bother me that, after a certain period of time, their licenses to drive a car expired. And then, due to the different ways that the Panamanian government gave out visas, some of their visas expired. And then, of course, when it came time in 1989 to renew our diplomatic plates (luckily we had renewed our '88 plates), since we could not send a letter to the Foreign Ministry requesting

the issuance of diplomatic plates, we had to go out and rent automobiles for every officer in the embassy, and all private cars were stored out at the military base.

Q: Well, you say for the officers, but what about the staff?

DAVIS: Well, that's really all the staff. Any Americans down there eligible for diplomatic plates who could not get them, we rented cars for them, whatever their position was.

Q: Did you have any trouble with Washington sort of on the bureaucratic thing of trying to get these?

DAVIS: No, we planned this. Of course, we had lots of time to look forward to this. And, although ordinarily license plate issuance was due the first of March, we knew they were behind, so we did get a little extra time on that. But we had sent in our various plans of renting automobiles, so at the time it happened we were prepared for it; the approvals had come through.

Q: You had mentioned, I think when we were talking off the microphone, about problems with the utilities, and Washington didn't quite understand.

DAVIS: Well, I tell you, see, the thing is, this was no criticism, but we had the secretary of state, the assistant secretary for Latin American affairs, and two men, the deputy assistant secretary and the head of the Panama Desk, none of whom had ever served overseas. And when they came out with the sanctions, I thought that utilities and telephone bills should be considered minor expenses and that we should be allowed to pay those. They agreed on the telephone bills, because of the need to communicate and so forth, but they said they wanted to call Noriega's bluff on the utilities. And, in May of 1988, when the negotiation was going on between Mike Cosak, the deputy assistant secretary, and Manuel Noriega, for his removal, I told him to please talk to Noriega and tell him that the negotiation would be canceled if anything happened to our utilities. And then the notice came in that as of April twenty-first, I think was the date, that the utilities were turned

off. Well, since I had the assurance of the negotiating team that Noriega had promised them that he would not turn them off, I assured my country team, “Look, I don't care what they've said, I can tell you that they will not be turning off these lights.” And the next weekend, they turned them all off. And of course I immediately got in touch with the negotiating team. We had made plans for that, so we knew what were doing if they turned off the utilities. We sent them into hotels. We did make a mistake, the admin. man put some of them into apartments that were right near the center of all the demonstrations, but we rectified that very quickly and got them into hotels. And it was only within two or three days, we had them all back on again. In fact, it was quite cute, a lot of the girls sent me little notes that said, “Dear Mr. Ambassador, thank you for a weekend at the Marriott.”

But it was particularly difficult for John Maisto, my deputy chief of mission, and myself, because we had assured them they would not be turned off. And then Mario Vonyoni, who I think Noriega talked to about putting on the electricity...

Q: Who was he?

DAVIS: He was a businessman, who had been on TV many times speaking on behalf of the Noriega regime, and also a member of the Assembly, and a very good politician, quite frankly. I don't know whether he did it to be mean, but the first electricity he put on was in John Maisto's apartment house, and then they delayed quite a bit before they put some of the others on. And so that was another factor. But I would say our credibility with the staff was greatly affected and morale was very much down. You've got to remember they had already gone for quite a few months when that happened, and this was just another blow to them.

Q: Was your staff being harassed, outside of this type of thing? We've all seen pictures of these goon squads that were going around beating up the opposition. How about the embassy staff?

DAVIS: Well, several people were stopped and had to bribe their way out of it, twenty-five or fifty dollars. And I think it was a smart thing for them to pay it, rather than to be carted off.

But we had another thing happen that was quite interesting, and really it was one of the saddest things that happened. Anyone who had a traffic violation, whether it was justified or unjustified, anyone that got a traffic ticket, they would pick up their license. And they refused to recognize our diplomatic status, and we refused to let our people go to court. We had to get that plan in progress, so it was agreed by the State Department and ourselves that when they got their second notice to appear in court, which they could not do, they would have to leave the country. And we had two families that had to leave the country because they had traffic violations. And we did not want them to go to court because we thought it would be settled against us, with the PDF trying to prove their strength and throwing our people in jail for not having diplomatic status and for breaking the laws of the country.

Q: Well, did you feel that there was an organized attempt by the PDF to try to, in a way, drive you out?

DAVIS: No, I think that they were more interested in harassing us. I don't think Noriega wanted us out. You have to remember that Noriega knew what was going on in the military also, and yet Noriega never brought up some of the flights we were running out of the military base. That was never an issue. They may have stoned our embassy in June and harassed certain Americans... I would say, in most of the cases I talked to in the accidents, they felt that they had either been speeding, or gone through a red light, or whatever it happened to be, and they didn't think they were singled out. But I would say that Noriega threatened, there were certain people he wanted, and he declared two people persona non grata, referring to another one as persona non grata. And then posters came out of myself, my deputy chief of mission, and my daughter, large posters about four by eight,

right off the embassy and in the main plaza right off the airport, saying: “These people are persona non grata in Panama.”

Q: Why was your daughter...?

DAVIS: Noriega did not like my daughter. My daughter, first of all, when the demonstrations first started, a group of friends invited her to go to church, and she went to church on the big day that was the Assembly against Noriega. And everybody came to it, giving the brochures and everything, and so when the picture was taken, it looks like she's passing them out; she was really receiving them.

Q: How old was your daughter at the time?

DAVIS: She was 32 years old. Of course, another thing was, many of the opposition came to the residence. And a lot of times they would come to the residence while I wasn't there, and my daughter talked to them. And many of the girls who were harassed, particularly one in the Isthmian Bank, came to tell her what they'd done to her and what they said to her and how they had molested her and pulled her arm out of its socket, and then showed her the bruises and everything. And, of course, I was called in later, but when I got home, I came in and she was there. But then my daughter, of course, once she became involved... I remember when La Prensa had been closed down, they held this rally at the Dante, which had been burned, in the parking lot. My daughter and I went down there and walked through the crowd to let them know we supported the return of La Prensa, and to contribute to the employees' fund, and let them know we were for freedom of the press. And after that, Noriega would accuse Susy of being places she wasn't. For instance, when they went into the Chamber of Commerce and removed all the books and papers, they claimed that she came by and was standing outside yelling with the crowd. Well, Susy at that time was not even in the country, she was up in Washington, DC Another time, they said she was with a group which was throwing rocks at buses going by with PDF people in them, and she wasn't anywhere near that.

Q: I'm a bit surprised at this. I would have thought that, sort of in the Latin American context, picking on your daughter was not a very smart political move.

DAVIS: Well, let me tell you two things they did to my daughter. First of all, they accused her of being the prostitute of the diplomatic corps. Then, when they were after money, Encorea, who right now is the mayor of Panama, but a very strong radio announcer and one of the most popular names in Panama, one of the first to come out and ask for violence and demonstrations against Noriega, on a radio program, and she was exiled, and she is also a lover of Susan Davis, these two lesbians. And then another time, Susy was always trying to get people out who were in jail, and this man was in jail, and Susy went down to the restaurant with my son... It was a funny thing, we had a reception at the embassy, it broke up about 9:30 or 10:00, and she went down to this restaurant to get cigarettes. And when she walked in, a friend of hers was with a colonel in the Panama Defense Forces, and he called Susy over. So Susy started talking to this fellow about letting this man out. She said, “He's a family man like you. He's a good Panamanian. Why don't you let him out so he can be with his family for Christmas?”

And the colonel said, “Well, I'll see what I can do.”

And then she made the mistake of going after this man who is married to Fernando Allenta's daughter. I should remember his name because I talked to him so many times. But, anyway, he was thrown in jail just before Christmas, and she said, “What about Ricardo (or whatever his name was)?” And he got mad, and they went yelling back and forth. And, just then, her friend came up and thought it would help to give her a glass of champagne. So my daughter took the bottle and threw it across the room. Then the bodyguard of this... Plato Hernandez, that was it. The bodyguard came between them and Susy fell down. And the next day the entire front page of the opposition press had: “SUSAN DAVIS, DRUNK AND DRUGGED, INSULTS AN OFFICER OF THE PANAMA

DEFENSE FORCES." And it goes on to say (this was so silly) that they got into an argument and she fell backwards, and her dress went up and you could see her pants.

Q: I would have thought this wouldn't play too well.

DAVIS: Well, they attacked me, you know. First of all, I was taking out a writer, a very fine lady. And they passed pamphlets all over Panama, to the Union Club and to the Assembly, telling about our love life and different perverted things we did. And at the end it said, "One of our real pleasures was that I liked to take out my teeth and suck on her breasts." And this girl was just a lady from the old school. I mean, she was not what you'd call—they had it in there, the modern insensitivities. She was very sensible. She went to Miami for a month. It really broke her heart; she was quite broken up about it.

Another time, I hadn't been outside for dinner for a long time, so my daughter and I met a Colombian girl who was also... My daughter's a dress designer...this is my daughter Karen, who was visiting me. She knew this dress designer named Dorian, and we went down to the Marriott and had dinner. Afterwards I came down on the elevator with Dorian and walked her to her automobile, where they had the valet service in the rear. And that came out on the front page, her picture and mine (they got her picture from her I.D.), and said, "North Americans would like to know that this is the mistress of Ambassador Davis. He has supplied her with a limousine and a butler."

Q: I don't want to overdwell on this, but the technique of this I'm trying to figure out. This looks like it was aimed a particular group within Panama. Because obviously to the sophisticated element and all, this is sort of abhorrent.

DAVIS: Well, let me tell you the worst thing that happened. They had a front page article that said, first of all, that I was thrown out of Paraguay by President Stroessner because...and they used the term "dipsomaniac." I had never heard that in Panama, dipsomaniaco. I had heard barracho and things, but never this. Then it went on to say that also I was very fresh with the Panamanian women I had gone out with. Oh, by the

way, they kept referring to the fact that I was very unpopular with the diplomatic corps because I kept patting the women on the fanny for good luck. But then they said that the Panamanian girls had all told how fresh I'd been; I had shown no respect for them. But then, under my picture, they put: “The Geriatric Fossil.”

So I called up a man named (a lovely name) Iscolactico Calvo. He was the editor of the Noriega newspaper. So I said, “Iscolactico, I don't mind when you write things that people don't believe, because everybody who knows me knows that, while I may drink, I'm not a heavy-drinking man, and I can't remember the last time I was drunk. And also, if you talk to the two or three Panamanian women I've been out with, instead of saying that I was not a gentleman, they might tell you it was a rather boring evening. Lying like that doesn't bother me, but what really bothers me is when you get so close to the truth. Every morning when I get out of bed, I think of that geriatric fossil bit as I'm unwrapping my legs, and I resent that.”

But then, you know, I've got a series of cartoons, there must be about forty of them, that they wrote about me being drunk all the time, on rum or gin, and they show me as a marracho, always in cowboy outfits, one time with my boots off and my feet smelling.

Noriega was behind every one of these. Noriega gave them instructions to do these things.

Somebody saw me in the Marriott, maybe one of the butlers or something called up and reported it, so he made a big issue out of it. And it really bothered her, because this was a poor girl, I'd say in her early '30s, living alone, running her little boutique. And she was really scared, because these PDF people would come by every now and then and look up at her. She really got quite scared.

So, along with attacking me, of course, was John Maisto. They put John Maisto's picture in the paper, and it said, “Fellow Panamanians, remember this face. This is an enemy of Panama.”

Q: He was your deputy chief of mission.

DAVIS: Yes. Then finally they came out with a bigger picture that said, “Fellow Panamanians, remember this face. Tomorrow we will print his address and telephone number.” John's home was about six feet from the street, a lovely home, secure in every other way, but too close to the street. So I called John up and John said, “Don't worry, Mr. Ambassador, I'm already making arrangements to get out of here.” So he moved out and went to an apartment. It wasn't the same type of living for him, and it was very difficult for him entertaining, but...

And they continually attacked. In fact, when the Haiti overthrow failed, John was in the States, and they blamed it on John. They said, “John Maisto fails another coup. He was behind the coup in Haiti also.” See, because you've got to remember, John was working with the Philippine Desk at the time that Marcos was removed. So when I brought him down, we had quite an event. It looked like Marcos might be accepted by Panama, so then we didn't know what the hell we were going to do about my deputy chief of mission; is he going to be able to come or not? But they kept bringing that up, that he was brought in as a man who overthrew dictatorships. I think you'll find, in most places, they attack the deputy chief of mission rather than the ambassador. And they attacked him as being the man behind the opposition.

Q: What was the result of this type of campaign? Did it have any effect, say, on your morale, the embassy's morale, your DCM's morale, or within the context of being able to deal with people in Panama?

DAVIS: Well, you've got to remember we weren't dealing with any of these people attacking us. We were not having anything to do with them. The only time I called Noriega, from the time he was indicted on, was when people were thrown in jail and I wanted to get them out. I'd call him in a mad mood, saying I want these men out of jail, and Noriega usually came through with it.

But the prize of the indictments... You have to remember that we met quite frequently, and many times when there was something or other and Noriega and I together, one on one, John Maisto went with me and we would talk about these things. In fact, John Maisto and I met with Noriega Hustini and insisted that he get that picture of Noriega on paper. And then the paper came out, and a funny thing, it came out and said, “This is the last time we'll be able to do this; we have orders not to print this anymore.”

But it didn't affect John or myself. I don't think it affected many Americans; the Panamanians were the ones. The sign across the street, of the three of us, that said: “Fellow Panamanians, these people are persona non grata in Panama,” and great big pictures, they resented it, the Panamanians on our staff resented it more than we did. It bothered them.

Q: How about your contacts with Panamanians, did this have any effect?

DAVIS: I don't know whether I mentioned it before, you've got to remember, before the indictment, we met with all sides. We met with President Delvalle, who had called me in and asked me to meet with Solis Palma and a group of businessmen. And some of the ministers would ask to come see me, and different members of the Assembly would ask. In the meantime, we were meeting whenever the opposition wanted to meet.

After the indictments, we had no connection, but I would say that I did not go along with it, I didn't force the issue. I stayed home quite a bit; I didn't do as much entertaining. Most of my entertaining would be to bring fellow ambassadors in on a series of meetings to brief them on what was going on, what the stance of the United States was, why we were doing the different things and why we felt they were necessary, and what we felt was going to happen in the election. Right up to the election we were meeting with them periodically. Say, the European group, I used to meet with six or seven of the European community, periodically, or brief them.

Also, of course, we briefed them on the procedures in case of an invasion and if Noriega started running around and doing some of the things some of his people were threatening. He was threatening, you know, to go take hostages of some of the people. Of course, towards the end, he got even worse. He was marking homes of the opposition and letting the Americans know that he had a list of all the Americans and where they lived, what apartment houses and so forth.

Of course, in May or June of '88, we arranged for anyone who wanted to take voluntary reassignment, any families that wanted to leave could leave...I forget the term for that...optional...

Q: Were you trying to bring it down?

DAVIS: See, when I got there, there were 256 Americans, and then, with the departure of AID, it went down to about 200. And we gradually were cutting back on the regional offices and different offices, and cutting back in certain positions where we felt we could. And so when they finally ordered me to cut to 45, we were down to 107 people. We went from about 170 down to 107 sometime in January of 1989.

Q: How about consular operations? I would have thought these would have been a very important element in Panama.

DAVIS: Yes, that continued. We closed it down for quite a long period after they stoned the consulate; there were no visas given out. We then moved the operation into the embassy itself to take care of American citizens and continue our American section, but we did not give visas to Panamanians for quite a while. Of course, in separate cases of people you wanted up there, or for some reason we felt they should be going up there, we gave them the visas. Then the consulate opened again.

And, quite frankly, there was only one instance, I think, where we closed down again, when Curt Mews was picked up as running the clandestine radio. He was an American

living in Panama; his family lived there, too, a mother and father and he and his wife. Curt Mews is now in Washington. Anyway, when he was first picked up, they refused him our consulate staff's normal visitation rights. So we advised them that if they did not allow that, we were canceling all visas for Panamanians. And they immediately allowed us to start visiting him, and that continued all through his time in jail. He was freed on the day of the invasion.

Q: What was your and your staff's impression of the various efforts made to cut down on...well, we were freezing accounts, and we were not having relations with the government and all this? How effective was this? Did you feel that we could have kept going for a very long time?

DAVIS: Well, I tell you, Noriega at first was able to get money from Libya and other countries, and then he started using the money that came in from income. You've got to remember that from about the time we started the sanctions in '88 until we finally moved in, all that time they made no capital improvements to anything. Intel, the telephone system, all the proceeds from that, all the proceeds from Eirate, the electrical system, all went into Noriega's monies. In spite of the fact they seemed to be tight, they were still stealing millions of dollars, as was proven later. They would write checks for over a million dollars to “The Bearer.” People would just take it with “The Bearer,” go to the bank, and get a million dollars. There are some forty-three million dollars collected already of checks that went in that way. And he had several million dollars, of course, in his commandantia when they picked him up, plus quite a sum of money in his home. They were paying by scrip, too. And also the checks themselves became sort of a money, because they could pay the utilities with them, they could pay the grocery stores with them. And of course the grocery stores, in order to stay in business, had to take them. And I imagine that they got very little of that back. But it did have an effect. The morale of the troops was going down, even though they had the commissary and everything. They were being held for long periods of

time on alert, and they were not getting what they used to get for their families, which was not very much to begin with.

But I don't think it would have resulted in a collapse. I think that we had reached the point where we realized that they could struggle along somehow. Of course, the social security funds were all gone. They had no medicines. All these people were still paying into the social security and those funds were being used, but there was no medicine, no care for them, because they had no facilities, no properly working equipment or medicines. So all those things contributed to paying off payrolls and things like that. And of course the payrolls were put off. They sometimes went a month or two without getting paid, then they'd just get a partial pay, and their yearly bonuses were not paid. There were lots of ways they cut down.

I don't know whether I mentioned before, but when the negotiations failed in May of '88, Panama, the decision was made in Washington. I'm not saying it was because of the Bush campaign. There were rumors that they could... I think that that probably is what happened, but I have no proof of that. But we did get orders that Panama would be taken off the front pages, nothing would be done in Panama.

I really feel that that may have been the time that John and I should have come out more forcefully for the necessity of continuing the work in Panama and continuing more activity, because can you imagine how the opposition felt, after going from June of '87, then suddenly a year later they realize that everything is dropped by the United States? In fact, they kept asking, “What's going to happen after the elections take place?” I kept telling them, “Well, President Reagan, I feel, will not leave office without removing Noriega. How he does it, I don't know.” Elliott Abrams felt the same way; he felt that after all the strong talk by the president and members of the administration that there was no way he would leave office... But then we got down to the election. As I say, I think maybe I should have been more dynamic, but they wanted me out of the way. In fact, I took six weeks off.

Q: I wonder if you could explain, for the context of somebody looking at this, we had the 1988 election, George Bush had been nominated, why did they want Panama removed? Would you explain?

DAVIS: Because you have to remember that George Bush, when he was head of the CIA, dealt with Noriega. It was just a normal part of his job, as any director of the CIA would do. The Agency and the military had worked for Noriega since he was in high school. I don't think that's giving away any intelligence, that's just a fact of life. And Noriega knew the United States. In fact, Noriega was very much bothered by the fact that several of the people in intelligence had mentioned his contacts with them. Which he thought was something you don't do—good intelligence people never mention their sources or their contacts. So they tried to make that part of the campaign.

Q: The Democrats did.

DAVIS: Well, yes. I know that the rumors were rampant that Dukakis people were trying to get in touch with Noriega. Whether it started with Noriega trying to get in touch with Dukakis first, I don't know. I think that, after close study, thinking back on some other very big mistakes, they realized that it would be a big mistake to try to get to Noriega... because it might have backfired on them. They also felt that if it had been brought up and played up too much, they would have been asking questions, questions that the future president did not want to be held to later on. And they might say, “Listen, Noriega's still down there. He's a big drug dealer, he's a rapist, he's all these things. What are you going to do?” Well, they didn't want that brought in. I think they didn't want President Bush to make statements about what he would do in the Panama case. Because, first of all, that was not his main issue at the time.

But it was dropped, and the opposition did not like it very well. I mean by that...

Q: The Panamanian opposition.

DAVIS: This was more of a political operation than a citizens', and the Civic Crusade, both. But I do remember that they came to me a couple of weeks before the election and said, “Mr. Ambassador, you know, nothing has happened. We've been waiting here patiently. We thought we had the United States behind us. We want to know, what do you think will happen after the elections?”

I said, “As soon as I know, I'll let you know.”

Shortly after the election, they came and met with me again.

Q: This was November of '88.

DAVIS: Yes, November of '88. They said, “What do you think will happen now? Can you tell us?”

I said, “Give me two weeks and I'll find out.”

So, I'll never forget them. I called in the Panamanistas, with Endara; I called in the Christian Democrats, with Arias Calderone; and the Moldarina group, with Billy Ford and Alfredo Ramirez. And I said, “Gentlemen, you and I have always been very frank with one another and..., and I promised you I'd tell you what I feel will happen between now and the inauguration. I don't think a damn thing will happen.”

Billy Ford got so mad he walked out.

I said, “I just think I should tell you, because my indications are that nothing will happen with Panama until the new administration takes over.”

He said, “What about the fact that you thought President Reagan would not leave...?”

I said, “Well, for several reasons, which I can't discuss with you now, I don't think that's going to happen. I think that it's going to be put on the back burner and let the new administration handle the problem and take over.”

But then we started a rapport that I think was the key to our success in the election in '89. And John Maisto played a big hand in that.

Q: This was the Panamanian election, in '89.

DAVIS: Yes, '89. What we did, we started meeting with the opposition groups, the same groups: Endara, Ford, and others, Escavelle and the Liberals and so forth. And they started meeting together. We finally forced them to hold meetings together. We told them that if the opposition was not unified in the '89 elections, there was very little chance the United States would help them in any way at all. And finally, I think it was December or January, they came out with the unified slate: Endara, Arias, Calderone, and Billy Ford. Endara was the representative of the Panamanista Party, which received the most votes in the 1984 election. He also was the cross-bearer for Eno Ferarias, the great politician of Panama who had passed away in August of the year before. Arias Calderone possibly was the one that felt he should get the number-one spot, but in order to bring unity, he was the one who said that I think what we should do, I will promise unity and work with the slate, and I will nominate Endara to be the president. Endara was nominated, and that brought about the unity that lasted all through the elections, through the time they were all meeting up together, right straight through, staying together, until they were brought in and sworn in on December 20, 1989.

So I feel that the work of the embassy is something that we can be proud of at that time, because it was our working with them, guiding them...I don't mean that we were telling them what to do, but we were telling them that you need to unify if you're going to win, and they stayed together. And of course we helped them in many ways that I can't disclose. Not the State Department, but other agencies of the government helped them.

Then of course another thing that the embassy staff did, working closely with the people in Washington, was to stress the need for good observers. And we set up a list of what we... For instance, Senator Dodd, a Democrat, and Senator Lugar, a Republican, had shown great interest, particularly Senator Dodd.

Senator Dodd, I would say, was my greatest political asset down there, because he was a former Peace Corps guy, a very blunt guy, very down-to-earth, spoke perfect Spanish. And when we met with Noriega (we met several times with Noriega), he could really throw it at him. I remember one time he came in about ten o'clock, we were at Noriega's up until two-thirty, just the three of us, arguing back and forth. And not drinking very much either. I always remember that, I don't think any of us had anything, well, if one had one drink, we all had soft drinks and coffee, and argued about the need for democracy. And Noriega argued back, “I want a pure democracy in '89. I don't want a case like El Salvador and Guatemala, where it's just a temporary thing that when the military wants to they'll take over. And I don't think we should have something like Venezuela, where you don't know who's running the country.” [Similar quote pg. 58, part of first breakfast meeting.] Oh, he had good arguments; the guy really was well prepared. So we went back and forth.

But, anyway, so we suggested that a presidential delegation be formed. They did not like our selections. They appointed Murtha of Philadelphia, a fine man, and McCain from Arizona to be the two leaders of this. Mainly Murtha was the head of it because of seniority. But we pushed for that. And also, thank God, Jimmy Carter had the famous long title: Association of Freely Elected Democratic Presidents, or something like that, and so Jimmy Carter sent his crew down and they really became enthused. And Noriega could not refuse. See, Noriega said only observers invited by the government could come in. He finally said, “President Carter has a permanent visa.” So what happened, when they said that Jimmy Carter was coming, all the other countries then decided we'll send our strong observers, too. And many observers who could not come without invitation came under the umbrella of Carter's organization. And Jimmy Carter's work in Panama, and the work of

the Murtha delegation strengthened the whole international observing group to come out and say yes, it was a big fraud. People were voting that were not supposed to be voting; there was stealing of ballots, people could not vote that were supposed to vote. And they exposed the whole fraud. And there was no way any country, no matter how friendly they were to Panama, except for Cuba and Nicaragua, could come out and say that it wasn't a fraud, it was so apparent.

Q: Well, when the Carter thing came up, by this time the Bush administration was in. What sort of emanations were you getting from Washington about the Carter participation in this?

DAVIS: Well, I tell you, we got mixed views. First of all, they had no control over Jimmy Carter. That was an international organization, not sponsored by the government, and were coming down there on their own funds. I think President Carter did come down on military aircraft, because President Bush provided that for him, but most of the other people came over on funds from the organization.

There were two versions. First of all, we in the embassy felt it would be a great thing. The canal people, and those people who were against the canal, thought he would come down and do anything to protect the canal and establish that the Noriega-Torrijos regime was a legitimate one. There were great fears. And all through the time he was there, they thought he was going that way, because Carter kept saying he was not going to look at anything before the election. He was going to look at the actual election and see how that did. And on the day of the election, we thought sure that the members of the Panama Canal group were going to be right, because he said, “While I've been around here, it seems to me like a lovely election. Everybody's in line voting. It seems to me there haven't been many problems. I've seen no... It's just a typical democratic election.” And that set Noriega up. He didn't mean it that way. But, you know, I don't mean this critically, but to me and to my staff it's amazing to meet a man who had been president of the United States as long as

Jimmy Carter and still be so innocent and naive. I mean, I think it's a tribute to him. The man is just a normal, pleasant person.

Rosalynn is much more sophisticated. Rosalynn kept arguing, “But, Jimmy, if they're making out voting records and letting people vote more than one time, don't you think we should consider that?”

He said, “Well, we'll look at that on election day.”

So what happened was, when he saw the actors' voting sheets come in and realized they weren't the ones he saw at the polling places, and that the votes he'd seen at the polling place were being reported fraudulently, he went in and he said, very emotionally too, he said to one of the members of the election tribunal, “Tell me, you look like an honest man, you must be a man with a family, you must be a loyal Panamanian, what are you doing to your country? You know those are not true. Those are false records. Why don't you tell people? Why don't you tell people?”

And they didn't.

So then he went to make a press conference, and Noriega refused to let him use the press facilities. So he called him to the Marriott. Unfortunately, I couldn't be there, but the press people there thought it was one of the most emotional press gatherings they had ever been at. He got in tears, you know, broke down, at what he thought was a great election, and how the fraud had been perpetuated, the people of Panama had been led into... voters pretending they were voting and their rights were being observed, and here the ballots were being changed and they were being faked, and this was a fraudulent election and all observers should see that. And of course that set the pace.

But then, of course, Murtha and them came down with no invitation, came down on a military plane with several other congressmen and prominent figures, people who had been connected with Panama in some way before. And that's when Werner and I had

a big run-in. I'm waiting on the ramp for them to land, and Werner said, “You know, Mr. Ambassador, I hope you'll impress upon them that I don't think there's any way they're going to get in the country.”

And I said, “What do you mean by that?”

“Well,” he said, “they're coming in under military orders. The president put them under military orders and they're coming down under military orders. They will never stamp them.”

And I said, “Well, I think I know Noriega very well. Noriega is not going to displease a group of congressmen and a group of prominent figures, particularly people he knows have been connected with Panama in the past. I don't think he'll do that. But, I tell you what, I wish you'd come on the airplane with me, and I will allow you to express your views.”

So I got up and I said, “Gentlemen, this is not going to be easy. I'm glad you're here. I see you're going to be a big asset to the observing process. I don't expect any difficulties. It may not be pleasant, but I want General Werner to give his views.”

And Werner said, “I want to tell you that I do not think they're going to let you in the country. And if you do not have proper identification and you go out in these vans that the embassy is providing, if they seize you and throw you in jail, I have no way to get you out.”

He's telling the congressmen and senators that with 13,000 troops against 3,000 Panamanians that's he's not going to be able to get them out.

McCain said, “What do you mean by that? Mr. Ambassador, what do you think?”

Bill Price was with the group, and Bill said...

Q: Who was he?

DAVIS: Bill Price was my deputy chief of mission. He's with the National Security Council now; he took Ambassador Briggs's place with the National Security Council.

And he said, “Well, I don't agree with that at all. I know Panama, and I don't think Noriega would do that.”

And I said, “Well, that's my view, too, but let's see.”

They went in, and they stamped them all.

Q: Well, Werner was a four-star general, was he just being naive?

DAVIS: I tell you one thing, I hate to say this, but I think Werner thought that the preservation of our security forces in Panama was more important than what he figured would be a weak democracy. He never thought that Noriega was going to be removed. He thought we would end up with Noriega a big enemy of ours, and his people would be in, and we would not be able to operate in Panama.

Q: Now, Werner was the...?

DAVIS: Commander in chief of the Southern Command.

So then, of course, what really was effective, I remember we had a young fellow named Bill Brown, whose father was in the embassy, too, an embassy officer. His van comes up, and there they are with the guns and the barricades stopping them from going in. He got out and showed his passport and said, “I'm with the American Embassy and I have a group of senators and congressmen and other prominent Americans here, and I'm sure that you don't want them to have a bad impression.”

They took it down and let them go through. Everybody went through.

Jack Vaughn went up north. We sent some of our other people out to Col#n. They went all over the country, observing.

And they observed some funny things. A group of women came in, about twenty women got off, I think. They had lipstick and were painted up and fingernails and high-heeled shoes. They were in uniform. And so one of the staff said, “What unit are you with?”

And they said, “What do you mean 'unit'?”

They didn't even know what the hell a military unit was. They were people Noriega sent in to vote.

And you know what happened, the amazing thing is, in some places where they figured about ninety military votes were cast, the opposition got seventy of them. In other words, Noriega sent these people, they went in and voted multiple votes, but they voted against him.

Q: You were watching this election, did you think that it might be a free election?

DAVIS: No, first of all, Noriega had set up the books. He had controlled the books so people could go there and would not find their name on the list. He had put on 150,000 new eighteen-year-old voters. They passed a law that the members of the Panama Defense Forces and certain government people could vote wherever they happened to be. Which meant that they could go in and vote all over the country or go to any polling place. Also, he changed locations of where people could vote. When they went there, they were not on the books. But basically he tried to scare people, too, by threatening: “Don't go to the polls,” and things like that. “You won't be honored at the polls.” That was particularly done in small areas, where the PDF said, “I don't want to see you going to the polls.”

But we felt that if they got out the vote, that Noriega would be dead. Werner thought that the fraud would be what they called an acceptable Latin American fraud, and that Dukey would go in, and then we'd be stuck what to do about Noriega.

Werner, I will have to say this, he was one of the best...I'd say he's a Latin American expert, no doubt about it. Not only did he know Latin America, but he was briefed on it every damn day, so he really knew what was going on. But he had his own views. He thought we should accommodate with Noriega and continue on. Which a lot of people still feel, you know. A lot of people say, “Why this sudden change against Noriega? I mean, what the hell, we knew what he was before, and, you know, we deal with some scum anyway. You know, we deal with some heads of state we know are dealing in drugs or killing people and everything else, why suddenly Noriega?”

Q: After a time—not today, but after a time—what was the impression of why Noriega became such a focal point?

DAVIS: Well, see, first of all, they went for sixteen years. When Torrijos was thrown out, the democratic forces are not holding elections. Noriega's in, and Torrijos had promised at the time of the treaty, not in writing, but had said that if you sign the treaty...

Q: This is the Panama Canal Treaty.

DAVIS: Yes, Panama Canal Treaty. That if you sign the treaty, I will work towards democracy in Panama, gradually. And gradually he did. First, he held an election of the Assembly. And then, of course, when Noriega came in, they held the election for the officers. They really thought that they were going to win that election, with Barletta and Delvalle and so forth. But that's going back.

See, I don't know why everybody makes a big fuss about the fact that this was a fraudulent election, and the United States said go down to go to the inauguration. What the hell, if we didn't send people down... Latin American elections. Have you ever seen a Latin American

election that wasn't a fraud? Everybody claims it's a fraud. In some Bolivian elections, we know that it was a fraud. But as long as the other guy steps aside, we recognize...

Q: ...Mexico... That's the...

DAVIS: That's right. See Mexico always bothered me when I was in Paraguay, because of the fact Paraguay's civil human rights were not any worse than Mexico and yet we did nothing about that.

But, getting on with Panama, we had the elections very well diagnosed in the embassy; we had told them what we thought would happen, and it did. But we were very surprised, as a matter of fact, that Noriega kept going on and on, that he didn't see didn't see the handwriting two months or a month ahead and cancel the elections on some technicality. But he went ahead with it; he really thought he was going to win. But he was defeated. Even the church poll came out and said it was seventy percent. Other polls came out and said it was sixty-six and so forth. And so he was licked and so he had to cancel it. And then of course the brutal beating of the elected candidates.

Q: I might add, for people looking at this, that both on television and in the papers there were pictures of the president and the vice president being beaten up.

DAVIS: That bloody picture, yes. That changed the whole antagonism of the American public to an invasion of Panama. They realized they had a vicious man. I mean, you didn't see that coming out of Romania. You didn't see these things. People don't read, but they could see that visual thing on the cover of every magazine, and I think from that time on the invasion became a possibility.

Q: Again, this is an unclassified interview. As the ambassador, CIA operations were under you, but Noriega had obviously been a CIA man for some time. Did this give a problems with the intelligence agency?

DAVIS: Well, the Agency, as I say, when I first got down there, they were ordered never to meet with Noriega without my permission. And of course after the indictments they had no official contacts with anybody in the government. What intelligence contacts they had with people in government outside of Panama, I don't know. But I will say this, we did use them in one way. They, through their former contacts, had contacts at the airport. Noriega was not allowing any visas into Panama, so we were having people come down with no visas, and they would give them the visa at the airport and let them in to work for three months, six months. And we were getting people in that way.

Q: But you didn't feel that the CIA was either a tout or working in a different way?

DAVIS: No. No. No, I think that the CIA cooperated, I would say, almost a hundred percent. I mean, well, maybe a hundred percent. My station chief and all his people were very cooperative, and my station chief was a very valuable advisor, because he knew so much about what was going on, in giving his views.

Now of course my defense attach#, Al Cornell, was a very, very valuable man, too. He and the CIA, knowing Noriega and the PDF, and also knowing the opposition, never felt that anything short of an invasion would take Noriega out. They thought he could withstand anything. We felt that, going into 1988, and then, once again, going into '89, we felt particularly that if nothing happened in January of '88... And then of course the indictments came along and that changed things. But then, when we went along through '89, all through the period I was up in Washington, they continued to feel that if nothing were done by January of 1990, the United States had a big decision to make. We either had to remove our embassy staff and have somebody there to represent us, or we had to start making a deal with Noriega in some way.

Q: Well, there was a time factor.

DAVIS: We couldn't go on much longer. First of all, the economy of the country was going to hell, all the businessmen were leaving, small businessmen were having a hell of a time. We could not keep the sanctions up forever.

Towards the end of 1989, starting in about August or September, you were seeing a definite trend. Noriega was getting more and more independent, but the businessmen and lawyers and investors, Panamanians and that sort of thing, were starting to say, “Listen, we don't like him, but we worked with him before. We had a good country. We might as well, why the hell don't we forget all this and go back and work with the man.” There was starting to be a big trend to take the status quo as it was before June of '87, to go back and work for Noriega again.

Q: Well, now, the election was held when?

DAVIS: May 7th, I believe, of 1989.

Q: Had you had any contact or briefing with President Carter, or did he keep himself aloof at the embassy?

DAVIS: No, I picked him up at the airport, and then, after that, we had a couple of telephone calls about what was going on. And then I saw him on the day he left—a very emotional man, a very distraught man. And President Ford came down also, and spent two days.

Q: Well, all right, the election happened, then what did you do after this fraudulent election?

DAVIS: Well, of course we were in touch all day long and well into the night with the Murtha delegation, in contact by telephone. And then of course some of the Carter people came over to the embassy also, and we all got together that night and discussed different things. And then, the next day, we waited to see what was going to happen. We went out,

and they were marching around, and they watched. And then they left. Then the day after that was when they all got beat up.

Q: Were any decisions made either from Washington or at the embassy of what you were going to do about this?

DAVIS: Well, they went back and reported to President Bush. We immediately started a campaign among the other embassies that was quite effective. See, the Europeans and others just recognize the countries, no matter who's the head. They... the government, and that's it, no matter what happens to the government. But we got it down; there were only ten or twelve there when the OAS started their campaign to negotiate to remove Noriega. I came out on May 15, and of course I was here all through the OAS negotiations.

Q: Whose orders was it that you left?

DAVIS: Well, this was our decision. The embassy had set up several options. The number one option was that if the elections were called off or if they were overly fraudulent and they put in their own people, that to show our displeasure we should recall the ambassador and cut the embassy down to fifty key people and all dependents should leave. And that's what President Bush did. The day after they were beaten up, he went on the air and recalled me and cut the embassy down to forty-five people.

Q: I don't know. I'm a professional diplomat, and I realize this goes back into antiquity, but it has always struck me as the height of nonsense that when tensions get worse between countries, what you do is you take out your ambassador. There are other ways of saying I'm mad at you. But to do this diminishes the ability to settle problems.

DAVIS: Well, see, my country team got together and that was their suggestion, and the State Department people all said that's how we'll do it. And I at the time, I might have been a little tired, and they might have felt, what the hell, what can he do here? But, looking back, I wish I'd fought it. I could have done a lot more there than I did here. I did nothing

in Washington, DC. I mean, what the hell could I do in Washington, DC? No, I think it's stupid; I think the ambassador should stay there right to the end.

Q: Well, this is diplomatic practice.

DAVIS: Yeah, they do it all the time. All the diplomatic corps kept saying to me, "Listen, when is the president going to remove you? He should recall you, to show his displeasure."

And I said, "What the hell, I don't want to leave."

Q: But it's really idiotic. It may have worked at one time, when you couldn't communicate things, but now you've got Western Union, or you can...

DAVIS: No, I tell you what, I will say this, I did not complain at all. I went along with the trend and sent the suggestion in, signed it, and never said I was against it. But as soon as I'd been up there a month, I thought, "What the hell am I doing here instead of back there?"

Q: Here is something that I think almost everyone who has been involved in foreign policy...if you don't have an official job... Could you explain a little about your experience? Here things are really heating up in Panama, you've been the man on the spot, you're called back to Washington because of our displeasure over what's happened down there, and then how were you utilized?

DAVIS: Well, I tell you, I got in, of course, late at night. Went down, eight o'clock the next morning, and met with Larry Eagleburger and Bernie Aronson and Dick Wyrole and several others, and we got briefings. And for the first few weeks, we had a meeting every morning at 8:30, and then we'd have a meeting, late afternoon, all on Panama. And then we had what was called the Panama Review Committee. It's kind of interesting to me that we talked so much about hypocrisy, and yet when all twelve agencies got

together, they'd talk about consensus. Because there's no way a group of twelve different agencies is going to reach consensus. Everything that was talked about had to go back to the particular agency—the CIA, or AID, or the Treasury, or the economic section, or the National Security Council—and then they would come back with their version, then somebody else would have to write that up, then we'd have to look at that. And it took them four to five months to get a document out, and when the document got out, it was not what they wanted. So nothing was being done.

Q: Basically, nothing gets done this way.

DAVIS: Well, I tell you another thing. I don't know whether it was the fact that I was a Reagan ambassador, or whether that's the way the treat all ambassadors, but many career ambassadors have told me they were treated the same way. I did not see Secretary Baker until I insisted that I wanted to meet with him. When I was to meet with Secretary Baker, I called his secretary and said, “I have a meeting such a such a date at three o'clock, I would like to meet with him for a while one-on-one.”

“The Secretary does not meet one-on-one.”

I said, “Fine, then I would like to keep it to a small group, if possible, and I will just bring one person with me.”

I get up there and the secretary mentioned something about the length of the meeting. I said, “Well, if it's going to be a short meeting, then I think I'll do most of the talking because I have a lot of things I want to go over.” And I walked in and there must have been seven different people, including Margaret Tutwiler, the press person, in there. And we met, probably about forty minutes. They got all my views, and I said that we've got to face up to the fact that we have to make a decision: either we are going to move in and do something, whether it's to kidnap him or to move in on a military basis, or are we just going to just leave that and let somebody take care of... somebody take care of our interests.

He said, “Well, the military thing is out, because the military is against it.”

And I said, “Well, does the military make that decision? I thought the president would make that decision.”

And he didn't say anything.

But that's the only time I've ever seen Secretary Baker.

Q: Well, this seems to be very much the style of Secretary Baker, looking at this and other ones, that he has a group, including his press spokeswoman, there and they seem to be the guiding counsel. This is strictly from outside, but Baker seemed to be kind of almost outside the decision making on this.

DAVIS: I was told by two very prominent...well, I would say two of the finest ambassadors I've met; I would say I've met a lot of fine ambassadors, but I put them in the top ten, told me that they met with Secretary Baker on something, and the next day they were walking down the Seventh Floor and Baker walks right by them. And I met with Baker, and I would say, no less than a week later, I went into...I think it was Mort Abramowitz, going to Turkey, for his swearing-in, and I was introduced to Secretary Baker. Very aloof.

And then when I did go over to my meeting with President Bush, it was partly my fault, but I was told ahead of time not to bring up anything of consequence. It would be a friendly meeting; if the president wanted a meeting where we would discuss certain things about Panama, he would call another meeting. And so I brought my daughter and three grandchildren with me. I check with Averell Ponti, who went to Mexico, and he was going to bring his children, so we all brought our children. I told him that I hoped I could get down there soon, and hoped there would be a prompt solution, but that was about all. But that's the only time I saw President Bush.

Also I know that many of the Reagan ambassadors, who had only been in...well, I know maybe four who were there less than a year, who were told in February, right after the inauguration, that they were being replaced. And I do know that when they came back, they had no opportunity to speak to the assistant secretary of Latin American Affairs, and never did receive anything from the president. Ordinarily, when you leave, the president sends you a nice little letter. Most of them got no letter.

I had got along fine with Bernie Aronson and everybody. I can't say enough good things about Mike Cosak or Dick Wyrole or...

Q: Could you identify who these people are?

DAVIS: Mike Cosak was the principal deputy assistant secretary to Bernie Aronson and to Elliott Abrams. Elliott gave me complete support. Dick Wyrole was head of the Panama Desk, and he worked with me very closely. Rich Mayer, who was his deputy, went out of his way to be available anytime I wanted him.

But I would say that the seven months, from May fifteenth to December twentieth, were not only the least productive, but felt more insignificant than anytime in my life.

Q: Look, I was a very insignificant person within the framework of the Foreign Service, but I have gone back from having responsible positions, and it immediately happens—if you're not right on the job, nobody cares. It's not just an administration, it's...

DAVIS: Well, first of all, they have no real place to put you. You have to kind of wait your turn on priority for secretaries. And also, at the meetings, you become less and less a factor. I think that we've got to do something about the control of the military and the CIA over the government. I think the State Department should hold these meetings with the other people and use them on an advisory basis, but I don't think that everything that goes

out of the State Department should be approved by the CIA, the military, the Treasury Department, and everybody else.

Q: Well, moving on to the American attack on Panama, which was what? December...

DAVIS: December 20.

Q: Were you in on any of the decision making on that?

DAVIS: No, I tell you, by that time I had done probably too much bitching. I didn't feel they were treating the opposition people who came up here with the proper respect. Several times, particularly one guy, Billy Gitano, who was really representing the opposition, came up to meet with Bernie Aronson. He got up there and Bernie was not in the meeting, and he came in during the meeting and said, “Look, I'm sorry I couldn't be here, I've only got a few minutes, but I wanted to tell you, unless you people start doing something there, we're not going to do a damn thing.” You know, that might have been all right in the course of an hour conversation, or a half-hour conversation, but to do bluntly do that. And I met with Billy Gitano afterwards and calmed him down. He was going to go back and make statements to the press.

Also, President Delvalle, who is of course now living in Miami, former ambassador Gabriel Lewis, a very dear friend of Carter's and ambassador during the time of the treaty, ambassador who Senator Dodd told the foreign minister of Panama when he was kicked out of the country, he said, “That was a big mistake, Gabriel Lewis knows more senators in the United States Senate than I do, and I've been there many years.” Gabriel Lewis and Juan Solsa, the immediate past ambassador. After the OAS meeting, in which they extended more time to the OAS, which they said they were not going to do, after they did that, Mike Cosak called me and asked me to make an arrangement for them to come in at eleven o'clock, which I did. He called me back and said..., “Look, we can't do it, it'll have to be at one.” So I didn't change it. I met them at eleven and took them all around the State Department and took them to lunch and then came up at one. We waited from one until

two o'clock. I kept going in and saying, “What's going on?” Finally I said to Mike Cosak's secretary, “Look, there's no way I can keep these people here any longer. Have Mike come out and just say he's very sorry, he's tied up with the White House or something, he can't come out.” Mike Cosak was under orders from Aronson not to leave that phone, and so he could not come out. He sent out some deputy or called up Dick Wyrole, I think, and Dick Wyrole came out. So when we were walking out, President Delvalle was stunned, but the two ambassadors said, “You know, we want to let you know that we feel that Mike Cosak and Dick Wyrole have been good friends of ours, and we certainly will forgive our friends for what took place today. But we will never forgive the insult to a former president and two former ambassadors of Panama.”

I kept arguing about what we should do and how we should do things, and I kept getting shot down. And so I ended up with a feeling that I was not in the inner group. And I can understand the plans for the invasion. I had been told that if any American had ever got killed, that we would be in there.

In fact, the officers were all set to come out with a strong statement against the United States and the fact that we led them down the path, that we had implied we would support their efforts and we would be behind them, and now we were leaving them in the lurch, and therefore they were going to give up the fight, too, and let Noriega take over. And this was just a coincidence, I called Gabriel Lewis and told him, “Hold off, don't do a thing. I think you'll find some good news in the next few weeks,” not knowing they were going to move that fast.

They called me the night of the invasion, and I went down to the task force. And the next morning, at seven-thirty, was the first time I heard that the president was sending me back to Panama. I got all ready to leave, Mike Cosak told me to get ready to leave, I went and got packed to leave at two o'clock. And finally, about one o'clock in the afternoon, Baker called me, he was in a hurry to go someplace, and said he wanted me down there, he

wanted John Bushnell to continue, which I would have done anyway, working with the candidates.

Q: He was the deputy chief of mission?

DAVIS: He was charg# d'affaires. I would take over as ambassador, but let John continue with the military and with the candidates. I said, well, I would do that anyway, make him deputy chief of mission and I would have him do that anyway. So I went down there, but I did nothing but argue, and I think that's one reason they removed me.

Q: How long were you there?

DAVIS: I was there from December 20 until January 3. I left the same day Noriega did.

Q: Well, let me ask you a question. I'm speaking again as a professional Foreign Service officer. In the first place, how can you lose an invasion like this? We had overwhelming forces who were already there. But there did not seem to be the hand of the State Department; it seemed to be incurably mismanaged.

DAVIS: Let me tell you. Let me tell you. It was very clear that the orders had gone out that once the invasion started, the State Department had no role, that they were not to make any statements. This is a good example, LaBoha called me to tell me Noriega had come into his residence. I was the second one he called, the Vatican first. But he said, “You're the second one I'm calling,” and I wondered who the hell was first. Then I figured out he'd call the pope if he could, he'd call the Vatican. But he called me, he wanted to get hold of Sisneros. I immediately got hold of General Sisneros, who was head of the 193rd, but a very close friend...

Q: This was an American general.

DAVIS: An American general who is still today a hero to the Panamanians. He was with them from the word go. He fought the military, his own military. He made statements of

what we should be doing, and was a real crusader for the Panamanian cause, and is still a real hero with them. So I called him. Luckily I got him—communications during all this thing were terrible—got hold of him. Then I called the State Department. Couldn't get Aronson out of a meeting, he was in some damned thing. I finally talked to John...oh, I should remember his name, but, anyway, he was working in the section then, a former ambassador, and I said, “Ambassador, will you please get word to Secretary Baker and Bernie Aronson that Monsignor LaBoha called me to inform me that Noriega is in his residence.”

And he came right back and said, “Just a minute, don't say a word about this.”

Meantime, Werner has been calling all over the place trying to find out how he gets in touch with LaBoha. Then he dashes over and calls a press conference. And he gets up there, and two of the reporters...

Q: This is the...?

DAVIS: Commander in chief of the Southern Command, Thurman. And he gets up there and says, “Gentlemen, I have an announcement to make. General Noriega is in the nunciateria.” (Not the nunciature, the “nunciateria.”) And so one of the girls, I forget which one, said, “But, general, what's a nunciateria?”

And he says, “Well, that's all I have to say.” He wanted to make sure the military made it.

Also why I got involved was they would make decisions, like John Foles, my political counselor, was back. His family had been back there since May. He was back to spend Christmas with them. This was, say, the twenty-second or so. They called me up. And this was Dick Wyrole, I really don't like to get into another argument with Dick. Dick said, “Well, we've called John Foles and he'll be coming down on the next flight.”

I said, “What the hell. I mean, Christmas is next Tuesday. The last time he got in, the guy came in with me. He's not even here yet, we can't even get him off the base. We don't need him. What's he going to do? He can't go out in the streets. Let him stay until after Christmas.”

He said, “Well, we've got his orders to go down.”

I said, “Tell whoever has changed the orders that I don't want him down here. Tell them to send him down next Wednesday.”

Then Bushnell orders all the people out of the apartment house—American officers who were there and staff members—so he can bring in the elected officials and their families. So I called up and I said, “John, who authorized this?”

He said, “The State Department did. They said I should get them in a safe haven someplace where we can give them proper security.”

I said, “Well, get them someplace, but don't move my staff. You can't move that staff.”

He said, “We've already got the orders.”

So I called back and said, “What the hell is going on? Morale is low enough. Here these people have been here for fifty-six hours, they finally get a chance to go back to their homes, and now you tell them they can't go there? In fact, somebody who moved into one of those apartments didn't even know if all their personal effects were all there. How the hell can you do that?”

Then Aronson calls me. And I said, “Look, first of all, John Foles does not have to be down here. We're still just a consular agent, we can't get him in because there's a war going on down here. There's nothing he can do. The task force is operating twenty-four hours a day.

He can't go out in the streets, he can't get any information. Let's wait until next Wednesday when things calm down."

"Well, goddamn it, all right," he said. "You told that to Dick Wyrole already."

And I said, "Yeah, that's right."

"What are you telling me for?"

I said, "I told him to tell you. What else are you calling about?"

He said, "Well, I want you to know those people are going to move out of those apartments."

I said, "Jesus, there are places all over..."

Q: Yes, but who were the people coming?

DAVIS: Endara, Arias Calderone, Billy Ford, and their families and some of their staff. And they move my people out of their damn apartments when there were empty apartments all over the damned place.

And I said, "By the way, you know, the looting has started down here, and the military made no provision for protecting businesses."

He said, "Look, the military is in charge. They just can't have people everyplace."

I said, "Well, look, they've got people outside the Nicaraguan and Cuban embassy, but they are not protecting the..."

He said, "You stay out of that."

So I didn't. I called General Thurman and said, “General, what the hell's going on? I'm getting calls from the Italians, the French, and everybody. We can't give them any help at all. Meantime, you've got troops around the Nicaraguan and the Cuban.”

“Well, that's just... We want to make sure that anyone who's in there stays there, and anyone who wants to get in can't get in.”

I said, “Yes, but weren't any provisions made to protect the businesses here, or to protect the various embassies? I would think that the first of rule of when you have a military action is to make sure that the other embassies are notified right after the action and proper security is given to them.”

“No, that hasn't been provided for, and it won't be. We don't have the power to do it.”

Q: They also didn't try to protect the major international hotel where the Americans were. We just left them.

DAVIS: No, no, no. Why, that's never been our... You know what happened when the Marines landed there? They got stuck in the mud. The people in the hotel had to form rope chains and street chains to pull them out of the mud. They lost their boots and everything. But no, no protection.

Also, nobody in the embassy, living outside, was told about the invasion. They should have been called in on a special meeting at eight o'clock, seven-thirty. All the staff should have been called into the embassy and told, “Fine, you're staying here. I can't tell you why, but you all stay here until I allow you to go.” There was a party going on. You know, Bushnell had a party on at the residence that night, and people left there at 10:30 at night. He didn't show up, he never told them what was going on.

Q: Looking at this, again, reading from newspaper accounts, it seemed to be so inept. And nobody... Also there was... of the papal nuncio, too.

DAVIS: Nobody was thinking of the personnel of the embassy. Well, let me explain further what happened to the people.

The embassy, at one-twenty in the morning, about an hour after the invasion had started, rocket-propelled grenades went through three different places. You know, if we realize how cheap cinder block is, it went through the cinder block into John's office, right through his lampshade. If the deputy chief of mission had been standing up, it would have gone right through his head. Meantime, the Marines were in my office. In my office, we had grillwork there, and one went in and it caromed off, shattered all the glass, shattered the glass on the table. The poor guy crawls out of there, and goes and crawls in John's office just as a goddamned other one went over.

And they're bitching down there; we're bitching in Washington. This happened at one-twenty, and finally, at four-twenty, they show up.

Q: This is protection for the embassy.

DAVIS: Protection for the embassy. I'm there at seven-thirty the next morning, they want to remove the protection. And I said, “Hell, no. You've got American people in there, that's the American Embassy, you protect the damn embassy!” And they did.

Q: There seemed to be an absolute lack of any liaison between, you might say, the civilian component, being the Department of State, and the military.

DAVIS: My reputation with the diplomatic corps was absolutely wrecked. On some of the intercepts, they'd say, “Well, evidently the American ambassador can't do anything for us.”

Q: Secretary Baker is supposed to be so close to Bush. Why was this something turned over without, you might say, the normal diplomatic component? Which is not just diplomatic niceties, it's a protection of American citizens.

DAVIS: Listen, first of all, when the State Department (Shultz and Abrams) wanted to do something after the election before the inauguration, it was all stymied by the National Security Council. None of that stuff got to President Reagan; they did not allow it to go up there. The military did not want any military action in Panama. And they stopped it.

And, of course, meantime (you know how you hold your monthly meetings with the American businessmen and the local heads of American firms), all of the those firms were being devastated. And I rode out one time to get to LaBoha. There they are, Marines with tanks and Marines patrolling, and a man walking along with a sofa, and his wife's got the three cushions, and his kid's walking along with a lamp. They stole TVs. After they looted all the materials, they went back in and took out toilets. They took things out they weren't even going to use—shelving and electric light bulbs and all that sort of stuff, they stripped. You know, I dealt with retail in my private life, and I know how many people have a thousand or two thousand square feet, and their whole family future is in that damn store. They have nothing else. Everything that they live on, everything they have for future, what they're going to pay for their college education is in that store, and it's gone. Can you imagine how they feel? I mean, if it had been me, I would have just cried in the middle of the room.

But that wasn't the worst of it. You know, the invasion was on a Tuesday. Five days later, they were still looting and going to new places. Like one man, Burger, who owns the great big tire plant there, they went in there on Saturday and ripped his place and set it on fire.

Q: Well, there were three other incidents that I think of that show very inept handling of this. One was the nonprotection of the American Embassy and the Marriott Hotel.

DAVIS: Well, first of all, not letting them know. Not letting them know. Wouldn't you expect your ambassador to call you into the embassy and keep you there if he knew there was going to be an invasion?

Q: Sure.

DAVIS: The only people who knew were the Marines. And the only Marine Corps security officer there wasn't even told a goddamned thing.

Q: Was this on deliberate orders?

DAVIS: I don't know. Now they claim... And this is why Bushnell's name was removed.

Q: Removed from...?

DAVIS: Costa Rica.

Q: Removed from being nominated to be ambassador to Costa Rica.

DAVIS: What happened was, I think it was over Baker's signature, a letter went to Helms, saying that all Bushnell had done had been under presidential orders. So Helms called back and said, “You mean that the president ordered the man in charge of the embassy not to protect the people in the embassy? He ordered him not...”

Q: This was Senator Jesse Helms.

DAVIS: Yes, Jesse Helms was the guy that stopped...

Q: I get the feeling something like this was controlled from the top and done poorly.

DAVIS: Well, you know, I can't understand, if they have what they call a civic affairs group, or community action group, why didn't they stop to think, if they take out the military, which was the police department, they're not going to give protection to the businesses. Wouldn't you think that if you're going to go in and have an invasion, don't you ordinarily protect the diplomatic people? Not only us, but anybody.

Q: Well, what about the other incident? Noriega was in the papal nuncio's place. And then we had American troops out there with a blaring music to...

DAVIS: For some reason...

Q: It was such a poorly...

DAVIS: It is true that the nuncio, Monsignor LaBoha, although he is a priest and a member of the Vatican, was very two-faced. He would say things to me, and then say different things to Noriega. And evidently maybe Thurman was briefed that way, Thurman did not trust LaBoha. And, of course, like a lot of Americans, they felt that, what the hell, we tell them we want it, this is our war, we get him, and they did not like the fact that LaBoha would not just turn Noriega over to them.

And I tell you what, many of the people involved in that lousy music were very embarrassed by it. It came from high up, and some of the colonels said, “What a farce!” I said to the colonels, “Tell me one thing. Noriega is a military man, he's well disciplined, and, no matter what you think of him, he's a professional diplomat. He's like you people. Who do you think the music's going to bother most, one of you people or an idealistic man like LaBoha? I imagine the poor monsignor was up all night long, couldn't sleep. I'll bet you or Noriega or I, I'm the same way, could lie down on the bed and go to sleep even if that thing was right in his ear.”

And they said, “Yes, that's true. Noriega, with his training, probably just lay out there and went right to sleep.”

I mean, what the hell, you know, you're disciplined for those things.

Q: It seemed childish, too.

DAVIS: Well, not only that, but they played rock and roll music, you know. And you know what LaBoha said? He had a sense of humor.

Q: Were you completely cut out of...

DAVIS: We were completely cut out of that. In fact, our representative down there... I insisted that we have a representative down there with General Sisneros, and he agreed, and we sent a very good man down there. They worked very closely together, and LaBoha liked him very, very much. And LaBoha called me down several times to talk to him, you know. And there were other things, things were going out, our officials in Washington were saying that LaBoha gave Noriega a deadline: You have to be out by noon. And he never did that. I asked LaBoha about it and he said, “No, I never said that, I never gave him any deadline. I'm just trying to convince him he should leave.” You know how he finally convinced him? He convinced him by saying, “Listen, you're not safe here in Panama, you can see that. You're not safe anyplace else, because the cartel will get hold of you. The only place you're safe is by going with the United States. They may bring you up for trial, but they're going to guarantee your safety. They're going to make sure nobody hurts you. And when you're up there, they'll make sure nobody hurts you. And then so you go to jail, but you can watch TV and write a few books and then you come out. But otherwise, anyplace else, you have to be dead.” And Noriega got kind of scared at the Panamanian demonstration, LaBoha told me, and he thought that might be a turning point. And then he called and told me he was going to come out that night, and so I came back with Eagleburger.

Q: So you came back about the same time as Noriega.

DAVIS: I was on the way back when Noriega left, but I knew he was leaving.

Q: Well, were you told, “Come on back, we're going to send somebody else,” or something like that?

DAVIS: I heard rumors about it, and I got a call from Larry Eagleburger, who said, “Art, what did they tell you when you went down there?”

I said, “They just told me to come down here and take charge of the embassy. They said that Bushnell would continue with the office-holders and the military, and I would take care of the embassy and make sure we got the place staffed and kept these people informed.”

He said, “Did they tell you about any changes?”

And I said, “No, but I tell you, I've heard rumors.”

He said, “What have you heard?”

I said, “I heard that they're replacing me with Bushnell.”

He said, “Well, that's been changed. We're replacing you with somebody else.”

And I said, “Who?”

And he said, “Dean Hinton.”

Well, see, when I was up there, I had suggested Dean Hinton. I thought Dean Hinton, or Ed Core. I thought Ed Core would be a good one, because Ed and Dean have that knack of getting along with the Latins. You know, they're tough, but yet they get along with everyone.

And I said, “Well, I'm very pleased to hear that. When do you want him down here?”

He said, “Well, this is the tough part, we want him down next week.”

I said, “You mean...” See, when I left in May I couldn't have any farewell parties. I said, “Once again I can't make my courtesy calls.”

He said, “The president's already called Hinton.”

Which was not true, by the way. Hinton told me later he was not called until the next day. But I think it was Aronson and Baker who wanted me out of there. I had made too many waves with Thurman. Also, you know who stopped... and I got this from a very good source. Bushnell was the man, but Thurman heard about it and he said, “Hell no, I don't want him.” And he suggested, through the National Security Council, Hinton, because I think he was there when we talked about it. But Hinton was the logical guy.

But, anyway, so I said, “Well, don't you think the Panamanian government should know this?”

And he said, “Well, hasn't anyone been told?”

And I said, “Well, look, the foreign minister hasn't heard about it. I'll check with him.”

He said, “Gee, will you do that?”

So I went right over to the foreign minister. This was funny. This was on a Monday, I think. Benares is very nationalistic, but we do get along. And so I said, “I just came in to say farewell and say I appreciate all the cooperation we've had in the past. I really hate to leave Panama, but I'm glad things turned out and that democracy won.”

He said, “Well, when are you coming back?”

I said, “I'm not.”

He said, “Well, aren't they supposed to tell us about that? Why are they taking you out?”

I said, “Well, they feel that with a new government they'd like to have a new ambassador.” I lied. I said, “We agreed that, once the democratic forces made it, since I worked so closely with you people I would probably be taking your part, and I'm supposed to

represent the United States. And this was all agreed upon, once the democratic forces won, that a new ambassador would come in."

He said, "I think that's stupid, you've been working with us all this time. But don't they have to send me something?

Q: Yes, they have to get an agr#ment.

DAVIS: I said, "Haven't you had an agr#ment?"

And he said, "No."

And I said, "Well, maybe they talked to President Endara."

So he said, "Just a minute." He called up.

I said, "Don't tell him. Please don't tell him what I've told you, I'd like to tell him myself. But ask if he's received any request for a agr#ment for a new ambassador from the United States."

And that's just what he said. He said, "Well, thank you, Mr. President." And he hung up and said no.

So I called up Larry Eagleburger back and I said, "Larry, what the hell? You just put me in a hell of a spot. Who's arranging the agr#ment?"

He said, "What the hell, didn't anyone do that?"

I said, "Did anyone get any instructions to do it?"

He said, "Well, I thought Bushnell was taking care of that."

And I said, “Bushnell has got a lot of things to do. What the hell, he probably hasn't thought of it. If you haven't thought of it up there, he certainly hasn't had time to think of it down here. You want me to make one out?”

I called Bushnell and he said, “Well, Jesus, I thought I mentioned that to the president.”

And I said, “Well, the president said he hadn't heard anything about it.”

He said, “God, I guess I haven't told anybody.”

I said, “When did you hear about it?”

He said, “This morning.”

And I said, “Well, I'll go ahead and make up the agr#ment.” So I made up the agr#ment.

I called him and said, “Will you give me a verbal agreement, such as we did with Thomas Rodriguez?”

And he said, “Fine.”

I said, “I'll send it right over to you.”

So I then I hurried down to see Endara and Ford and Arias Calderone. They all saw me, we went in and they wanted to show me they had discovered a great big hidden room down there, a great big lab with tables and everything else. So, anyway, they take me up, and I said, “I just wanted to let you know that I'll be leaving next Wednesday.”

They said, “What for? Are you coming back?” I think maybe Lee Nidas might have called them there. “Are you coming back?”

And I said, “No, I'm being replaced by a very fine ambassador. You should be very proud, he's one of the finest ambassadors. Not only is he a former AID man, so he can help you

out with your recovery, he also is a fine economist and he knows Latin America. And he's one of the few career ambassadors that we have."

"Well, fine, but..." and Endara broke down and cried. And he hugged me and he said, "But I don't understand this. Why don't they wait? We don't have time to decorate you. We don't even have time for a farewell party. We couldn't have a farewell party even if we wanted to. You have to come back sometime."

And I said, "I'll come back sometime. But I would say let's not make it too soon. The new ambassador's here, we should give him time.

And Ford came over and Ford had tears running down his cheeks. Everybody was emotional. Ford was really emotional and said, "Goddamn, we go through so much together. Why do they do this? Why didn't they consult us?"

I lied again. I said, "Look, this is something we had discussed before."

And he said, "I know you, you're just bullshitting me. You're trying to cover up for them. They're taking you out probably because you fought too hard for us up there. They want somebody up there that will represent the United States, and that's logical, but they should keep you here for a couple of months anyway."

And I said, "Well, I think they should, too, but that's between us, and I'll be leaving."

I never got any explanation from anybody. I called Bernie Aronson five or six times.

Q: Bernie Aronson was the...?

DAVIS: Assistant secretary for Latin American affairs. I called him five or six times, and I found out later, from three other ambassadors who did the same thing, I never got to see him. Never saw him.

Q: Really?

DAVIS: Never saw him. I was right down on the next level. I was on the fifth floor and he was on the sixth floor; he was one above me.

Q: What was his background?

DAVIS: I don't know why they picked him. He had something to do with a contest. He was promoter of the contest program of the Democrats. He worked on the Mondale campaign; he was traveling with Geraldine Ferraro. And then he worked on the Dukakis campaign. I heard that McCain and a guy from Illinois had recommended him, and Baker thought it was a great idea. I'm not saying anything about his capability or that he shouldn't have been appointed, I'm just saying he did not see me. Plus, of course, we argued all the time. Friday, when he arrived in Panama, I said to him, “Don't yell at me, for Christ's sake, I'm the one that has reason to yell. You're sitting up there on your fat ass in Washington, I'm down here in the middle of it all. Don't yell at me.” And I think that made up his mind. And then he probably went to Baker and Baker said, “Well, he was kind of wise with me, too,” so I think they made up their mind to get somebody else in.

But Eagleburger evidently was not brought in on this. Eagleburger had no explanation for me. Nobody ever tried to explain what happened. In fact, what got me was, I'd walk the malls, and Joe Verneri came up and said, “Art, I've got to talk to you. What have they done to you? Goddamn, I'm so furious about this. Hell,... or not. This is terrible.”

See, I had talked to people on Christmas day and said, “Look, now when things straighten out, you'll be able to come down here and we'll have a party.” I told the diplomats. They thought I was full of shit, because I told the diplomatic corps, “Listen, Noriega's in the Vatican now. We're going to have one hell of a big party at the residence, and put on one of our big dances and big dinners, we're going to have a great time.” And then I didn't even have time to call them all up and tell them I was leaving. That's how it ended.

Let me tell you what happened. On the fifteenth or sixteenth, I was working in the embassy, in the Panama Department, and I had been called down to Presidential Appointments (not the one at the White House, but the one down on the first floor), telling me that Secretary Baker would like to have my resignation effective January first, because of a technicality that they had moved Hinton into the squad as of that date. And I said, “What the hell difference does that make? When I left Paraguay, somebody moved in my spot. But if I get a request from somebody else, I'll do it.”

So finally they prevailed upon me. Mike Cosak and Dick Wyrole said to me, “You don't want to...” I didn't want to cause any trouble anyway.

So, on the eighteenth, I tendered my resignation to the president, effective on the date of his pleasure. On the thirteenth of February, he accepted my resignation, effective January first. Now they're trying not to pay me for the month of January. They sent me a notice that I owe them six thousand dollars, and I'm fighting it now. I said, “Every ambassador gets twenty working days when he comes back anyway. Why don't you send me that fam, I've got to get it someday.” And I've been arguing ever since. They don't want to pay me. Now they want to pay me as a consultant at two sixty-eight a day. That's sad.

Q: It is sad.

DAVIS: But, anyway, they have appointed me to a committee on the Panama Canal. It's the Environmental Committee that was set up by the Panama Canal Treaty. I'm going to be sworn-in on that soon (if they ever get around to it), and I'll be going down to Panama three or four times a year. The new ambassador called me from Panama and said they want to have a ceremony, preferably down there. I said, “Well, it's been a year now, and I'll check with Ambassador Hinton. If he approves it, fine, to decorate me.” So I may get that behind me. See, President Delvalle had decorated me with the Order of Armator, on his last day as official president. But they want to give me the Grand Order or something else.

But I would say the last eight months I was with the State Department were not too...

Q: Well, thank you very much. This has been...

DAVIS: Well, send me that, and I'll add anything I can think of.

End of interview